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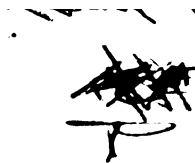


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HARD HARTLEY
PROSPECTOR



ALAS BLACKBURN





RICHARD HARTLEY: PROSPECTOR.

BY

DOUGLAS BLACKBURN

AUTHOR OF

'A BURGHER QUIXOTE,' 'PRINSLOO OF PRINSLOOSDORP.'

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A PROSPECTOR AND PIONEER IN THE
GRANITE FORMATION
OF
COLONIAL LITERATURE AND ART





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RICHARD HARTLEY, PROSPECTOR.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHASE OF THE OWL.

A YOUNG man sat against the rough stone beacon that marks the highest point of the Witwatersrand, and gazed dreamily through the smoke from his pipe at the mine-covered Western extension of the Main Reef.

Southward the landscape lay like a flat map seen through that crystalline South African haze that seems to make the atmosphere even clearer, and adds a beauty that no words have adequately described or painter caught on canvas. The line of reef extended east and west, the monotony of the softly undulating country only accentuated by the tall slender smoke-stacks, the framework head-gear, and the clumps of corrugated iron buildings that are the outward and visible sign of the wealth that lies beneath, and render the surface works of a gold-mine the most unpicturesque and prosaic of the evidences of human industry.



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The young man was a stranger to the district, or the knowledge that he was in the centre of the most historic and interesting spot in the Transvaal might have compensated for the absence of poetic suggestion in the physical environment and his own mental horizon. He did not know that within the proverbial gunshot of the ridge whereon he moodily nursed his knees and his gloomy thoughts one of the two mother rivers of South Africa had its source; that, away to the right, hidden behind the shoulder, stood the in-artistic plinth that surmounts the heap of loose stones piled by the Burghers of 1881 as sign and token of the oath they had taken to win and maintain their independence; nor that on the southern horizon before him, over the ugly intervening mine-buildings, was just visible to the trained eye the low kop with its solitary thorn-tree that has given its name to that other spot which shares with 'Majuba the perpetuation of a memory that Englishmen would fain forget.

The monument at Paardekraal is the centre whence radiate two great rivers—the Limpopo and the Orange—and two great events—'Majuba and Doornkop.

These and a dozen other history-making details lay on the page spread out within range of the eyes of the young man who sat meditatively puffing his pipe; but he was in no humour for historical retrospect. His mind was occupied by the very matter-of-fact certainties of the present and the more prosaic uncertainties of the immediate future,—a condition in which few men are philosophical enough to find solace in the contemplation of history, however pregnant



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with romance. Graham Wilmot saw in the mines before him only the deceptive mirage that had raised his hopes in the morning to dispel them at noon; and the horizon-bounded expanse of solitary veld beyond symbolised too poignantly the eventless, desolate future that seemed to lie before him.

He was passing through one of those hours of soul-travail that come to every man who takes his fate in his hands too delicately. The long-lurking anticipation of failure in the struggle had arrived at realisation. With his back against the beacon, his hands clasped round his knees, and his eyes fixed vacantly on the diaphanous horizon, he abandoned himself to that listless melancholy that, in some passive natures, is the sole protest against the last fell stroke of adverse destiny. He knew and cared not that his fate was too common on the stony Rand to justify his taking it seriously. With the self-consciousness of an inexperienced and too-softly nurtured youth, he looked compassionately upon himself as the chosen child of misfortune, and his heart overflowed with bitterness against all things.

For the first time in his uneventful life of twenty-five years he had been brought face to face with the stern fact that he was a failure, superfluous and insignificant, and that the little world of the Rand, which he came out with light heart to conquer, neither regarded nor wanted him. Ignorance and pride prevented his knowing that he was but a very ordinary type of a species too common on the Rand, as in most new countries. Bred to a life of inert ease, on



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the strength of expectations never fulfilled, he had found himself at five-and-twenty forced to earn his bread, yet totally unprovided with any special knowledge or fitness that would enable him to hold his own against the keen competitors in the struggle for life in great cities. Then came the too frequent sequel. It was decided by his friends that, having been a failure at home, he was precisely the kind of man a new and strenuous country like the Transvaal needed; and to it he was consigned, with a greater share of the paternal savings than justice to the rest of the family warranted, an outfit that contained nearly everything likely to be most useless in South Africa, a letter of introduction to a Johannesburg mining magnate, and an implicit faith and hope that talents, unguessed and undeveloped at home, would bud and fructify in the arid atmosphere of the Goldfields.

Of the rest, is it not written in the Book of Failures in every British colony?

The first chapter of the new life opened at the best hotel in the Gold Reef City, and detailed a round of such gaieties as the place provided. Succeeding chapters narrated the progress of the downgrade slide, from swagger hotel to second-class caravan-sary; next to the "respectable boarding-house"; finally to the ten-by-ten hutchlike bedroom in the yard of a small hotel with a pretentious name, where the accommodation is secondary to the bar, and all bedrooms are double-bedded and paid for in advance. Is it necessary to say that the letter of introduction, on which his friends set such store, proved as valu-



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able as such things are on the Rand?—evidence that the person presenting it relies more upon the good offices of others than on his own merits and ability.

With the end of six months came the changing of the last five-pound note, and the realisation that the time had come for him to wait no longer for Fortune, but call upon her in person. His room-mate was an illiterate bricklayer, earning from forty to fifty pounds a-month, and on his advice Wilmot determined to try his luck along the Reef.

He did not put on his best clothes, for, as the bricklayer explained, they were too suggestive of the "remittance-man,"—the horror of mine-managers. But, despite his past experience of the impotency of letters of introduction, he did put into his pocket one such, given him by an ex-employee of a West Rand mine, and addressed to the manager thereof; took a second-class return ticket to Krugersdorp; and began the wearying round of managerial offices.

At the property to which his letter directed him he was received by a dapper, consequential little Cornishman, who sat in a well-furnished office, and paused in the bullying of a huge Kafir to glance superciliously at Wilmot. His trained eye immediately detected the tenderfoot in search of a soft job, and he dealt with him accordingly.

"Captain's busy. What name?"

Wilmot told his name, and produced the letter.

"I'll tell the captain you're here. He's busy with Pass Inspector. Wait outside a bit."

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Ten minutes later Wilmot was arrested by a "Here, you!" shouted from the secretarial department.

"Captain 'll see you; go in there," said the secretary, jerking his cigar in the direction of an inner room, whence came the sound of laughter and the odour of good cigars. Wilmot walked boldly in. A big shaggy man lounged back in a chair, and three Hollander officials sat about, smoking and sipping champagne.

The captain was holding the letter of introduction at arm's length, peering at it with an amused expression. Without looking up at Wilmot he addressed him brusquely—

"Mornin'. Engineer, eh?"

"Unfortunately, no," Wilmot answered, smiling.

"Not an engineer, eh?"

The captain seemed very surprised.

"Assayer or chemist, I presume."

"I have no technical qualifications, I'm sorry to say."

The captain seemed still more surprised.

"Sorry there's no place on the Board of Directors. We've too many there already, haven't we, Trelawney?"

The secretary, who had entered behind Wilmot, giggled assent and helped himself to champagne.

The captain continued to screw his eyes at the letter, which seemed to amuse him hugely. He read it slowly, tracing the words with the end of his cigar till he came to the signature.

"Clarkson, eh? Is he sober yet?"

The secretary giggled shrilly and the officials added a guffaw. Wilmot felt the blood rush to his face.



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Three months ago he would have resented the flippancy, but his short experience of Johannesburg life had shown him the folly of carrying too much dignity. He simply answered, "Perfectly."

The captain handed him the letter, and for the first time looked at him.

"Tell you what, mister. I suppose you'll be going into the Dorp presently to look at a canteen. If you see my battery manager there, tell him you've come to take his job, unless he sobers up this week. Take a cigar. No? Have a drink, then?"

Wilmot declined both, and left.

"Clarkson, eh? Clever beggar that; knows how I hate having tenderfeet put on to me. He thought I should lose my temper, but I didn't. Euchred him, eh?" and the secretary and officials laughed in chorus.

At the next mine Wilmot found the manager a grave-looking man, whose general appearance suggested the family solicitor rather than the miner. He was frigidly civil, listened to what Wilmot had to say, and resumed his writing with a curt expression of regret that he was "full up."

At the third mine the manager proved to be the nearest approach to a gentleman Wilmot had met in his experience of Rand mining men. He invited his visitor to be seated, offered him a cigar, listened sympathetically to the brief statement of his hopes and desires, then with obvious sincerity and some diffidence announced that the state of affairs on the property offered no opening.

"You see, Mr Wilmot," said he, "people at home



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have very erroneous and hazy notions about gold-mines. They have not been educated up to reef-mining. They can't get rid of the picture of the man with pick and shovel digging out his bucketful of gold—work that any one can do who has a pair of arms. They cannot grasp the fact that gold-mining on the Rand is a scientific business requiring trained specialists. The unskilled labour is not a white man's work. There are a few easy jobs, but even they require special knowledge and experience."

He gave a brief but succinct sketch of the working of a Rand mine, that confirmed Wilmot's growing impression that he would have been better placed on the road to independence had he come provided with credentials as a bricklayer guaranteed to keep sober twenty days a-month than as the friend and nominee of the Directorate of the Bank of England.

At the fourth and last mine the manager did not even invite Wilmot into the office, but talked as he hurried towards the battery-house.

"You're the third man I've had pestering me this morning," he snapped. "Our employees are engaged in Johannesburg. Better see our town secretary," and he passed into the roar of the stamps.

Wilmot was reviewing the morning's humiliations as he sat by the beacon, to which he had wandered aimlessly from the last mine. He was in no humour for such food as his limited cash and the hotels of Krugersdorp would provide, and, not for the first time during the past few weeks, made Boer tobacco the substitute for his midday meal. As he smoked and





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mused, the silence of the veld was broken by the loud chirruping of birds, and there came in sight, a few yards below him, an interesting phase of bird-life. A large owl with an ineffective wing was being chased and mobbed by a swarm of small birds. Dazed by the glare of the sun, into which the creature had been driven from some shady cranny, and impeded by its broken limb, it was at the mercy of its tiny assailants, who pecked at the unwieldy fluffy ball with screams of wild delight.

Wilmot had read of such an incident in bird-life, and watched it eagerly. As the owl tried to escape its attackers by ungainly and impotent attempts at flight, the young man's sympathy went out to it, for was it not a parallel to his own case? He was crippled and down in a strange atmosphere, and the world was taking advantage of his helplessness to insult and buffet him as had those insolent mine-managers.

He got up from the beacon and cautiously followed the fluttering cloud, half intending to drive the birds away and give their victim a chance to escape; but before he could carry out his intention the owl made a supreme effort, and half flew, half ran to a cutting in the ridge, where it disappeared. The birds hovered around with noisy twitterings till Wilmot approached, then scattered, rattling and screaming into the air.

The owl had taken refuge in one of the many tunnels or drives that abound in the veld all over the Witwatersrand,—tunnels driven by prospectors in quest of the reef, and abandoned to become elo-

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quent monuments of misdirected energies and exploded theories. It was evidently an old working, and had been carried an unusual distance into the hill. Wilmot walked along its dank weed-covered bottom till he got beyond the range of light; then, seeing nothing of the owl, he struck a match and looked about him. The tunnel was about four feet wide and six feet high, cut through soft ground, which explained why it had been carried so far. He proceeded some fifty yards, now and then assisting his progress by striking a match, and found that two or three cross-cuts had been driven at right angles from the main cutting. He penetrated one, but found nothing; then explored another, half expecting to find the bird.

A few yards up his advance was blocked. Earth and loose stones had been taken from the sides and piled in the narrow passage to within a foot of the roof. The soil had a fresh look that contrasted noticeably with the firm hardness of the rest of the working, and Wilmot prodded it with his stick. As he stirred and levered the yielding mass his stick was arrested by something hard and rounded. He struck a match to investigate. What he found made him set to work earnestly to uncover the object. He put the stick aside, using his hands instead; and presently felt distinctly a metallic cylinder, covered in canvas. A few slashes with his pocket-knife, and the glimmer of the match revealed the shining brass of what instinct rather than knowledge told him was the barrel of a Maxim gun.

He stopped work to think, and in the few seconds'



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pause there passed through his mind in all its detail a story oft told in Johannesburg. He had discovered one, perhaps all, of those Maxim guns which disappeared when the ill-starred Reform Committee gave up its weapons to the Government of the South African Republic on the failure of the Jameson Raid.

That historical event was barely two months old. The Reformers were still in Pretoria jail, and the man who knew where hundreds of guns and tons of ammunition were hidden was a familiar character in Johannesburg canteens. Wilmot had listened to many such avowals, and had marvelled that the possessor of knowledge so valuable should prefer to earn a drink by spinning his story rather than claim the reward of many thousands of pounds which rumour declared was to be the guerdon of the man who would reveal the hiding-place of the rifles and Maxims unaccounted for at the surrender.

All this, and more, passed through the mind of the excited young Englishman. He laboured on, using his hands as spades, until sufficient of the earth and rock was removed to satisfy his sense of touch that his find was what he had believed it to be, and the light of his remaining matches confirmed it.

Sudden emotion finds expression in many ways. Some men collapse into stupefied silence, others are moved to noise, gesture, and action. Wilmot's safety-valve was sound and movement. The moment his mind had been decided as to the nature of his discovery, he yielded to an irresistible impulse to shout, clap his hands, and move his legs. In obedience



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to it he ran out of the tunnel, emerging into the glare of the cheerful sunshine, muttering excited incoherences.

Twice he re-entered and left the cutting, and as he ran out the second time the ejaculation on his lips and the swinging of the arms was checked, for, standing a few yards down the slope, regarding him with amused wonder, was a big powerful-looking man in riding costume, and bearing so striking a facial resemblance to Cecil Rhodes that Wilmot, despite his condition of suppressed excitement, could not but be struck by the likeness to the man who of all others occupied the mind's eye of every South African at that period. He gazed in turn in wonderment. The man was the first to speak.

"Got 'em very badly?" he asked in a broad Yorkshire accent, and grim, almost surly seriousness.

Wilmot was sobered in a moment, and recovered his presence of mind.

"No, lost them," he answered. "I thought I had got a fine owl, but he's got away."

The man sat down heavily on the bank of the cutting, and pulling a long grass, began deliberately to clean his pipe.

"Sort of naturalist, I suppose? I was that kind of fool once. Had the finest collection of butterflies in South Africa. Some one jumped them. What are you called?"

Wilmot's one idea was to get this unwelcome intruder away from the cutting. He walked a few yards down the hill as he answered—



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"When is the next train to Johannesburg?"

"Plenty of time; what's your hurry? What are you doing? Who are you?"

The Yorkshireman had all the bold interrogatory inquisitiveness of the Afrikaner.

"I think I've seen you in Johannesburg." Wilmot retorted by way of evasion, and in order to gain time to think out an explanation of his own ridiculous conduct, which had plainly excited the curiosity of the stranger.

"Funny if you haven't. I'm Dick Hartley. Everybody knows me, and I know more than is good for me."

He continued with irritating pertinacity, "Can't size you up anyhow. Don't look like a drinker. Saw you acting like a baboon; thought at first you'd got d. t.'s. Lots of fellows about here get 'em. It's in the air I expect. What did you say you were called?"

"Wilmot."

"Don't know you. Out long?"

"Six months."

"Six months too long, eh?"

Wilmot laughed. "You're a thought-reader."

"Don't want much thought-reading to see you're no millionaire. Know the breed. What's your line?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out."

"Well, you won't find it up that cutting. Know every inch of this ground. Old Jim Burton put that drive in. Told him he was a fool. Cost his Syndicate five hundred, not taking my advice."

Wilmot began to feel amused at the blunt sententiousness, the short jerky sentences, from which the

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first personal pronoun was uniformly absent. He no longer resented the questioning, but saw in it a desire for company. As the man gave no sign of moving, Wilmot sat by him, and lighted his pipe.

"I've been trying for a job over there," he said, indicating the Reef, "but it's no go."

"What do you know?"

"Nothing; that's what knocks me." Wilmot had caught the slang of the Reef.

"Booze much?"

"No, not much of a drinker. Can't afford shilling drinks."

"Got the price of a drink on you?"

How often had he heard that query since he had been loose in Johannesburg!

"It would just about run to a couple, and that's all. Are you coming into Krugersdorp?"

"Yes, this afternoon. Come to my camp. Got a cart. Will drive you in. Plenty of time. Camp's over there."

He indicated somewhere to the westward by a sweep of his pipe, which he did not remove from his mouth. "Get a move on. Must talk to some one."

Wilmot got up. It would suit his plan to get the man from his dangerous proximity to the cutting. He got a move on.

"You're a Yorkshireman?" Wilmot hazarded as the man led the way along the slope at a quick pace.

"Fr'Hool. Know it?"

Wilmot had once been to Hull. He spread his superficial knowledge out, thinly but widely.



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Hartley cross-examined him as to persons and places, at first in a tone betokening grave suspicion, which he abandoned on finding that Wilmot was acquainted with a Hull family mentioned incidentally.

"Twenty-four years since I came across the sea water. Been in every hole in this infernal country," he remarked by way of concluding the examination.

As they walked Hartley talked in his short staccato sentences, giving evidence of his extensive acquaintance with the country by narrating snatches from his experiences from Capetown to Bulawayo. He did not wait for any sign of assent or interest from his auditor, who was content to remain silent, for the roughness of the way required all his breath and attention. Hartley walked with the swinging ease of the experienced veld-louper, and they had passed the Paardekraal monument and struck into the rough country north-west of Krugersdrop when Wilmot, who was beginning to tire, inquired how much farther they had to go.

"Just over there," was the answer, and Hartley resumed his discourse on the peculiarities of the Rand formation, while Wilmot struggled on ten yards behind, wondering what precise distance "just over there" might be. He had not yet learned that in the phraseology of the South African it means anything from half a mile to twenty. Fortunately it proved comparatively short measure, for a quarter of an hour later there came in sight the tents and signs of a prospector's camp.



CHAPTER II.

COMPASSING HIGH TREASON.

HARTLEY led the way to a neat marquee tent. Wilmot sat on the stretcher-bed and glanced at the surroundings, which bespoke the experienced veld-dweller; for amid much untidiness and disorder there were signs of comfort and what one used to camp-life would describe as a first-class outfit, in which utility and luxury were judiciously blended. The instruments of the surveyor, prospector, and mining engineer were in evidence on floor, bed, and the packing-case that did duty as combined cupboard and table. A valuable kaross of rare skins partly covered the ground, and another, equally good, was on the bed. The remains of a meal decently served, with an amplitude of plates and proper vessels, were on the table, and a dozen other details bespoke a degree of settled ease not common in tent-life. Wilmot said something complimentary on the matter.

"You don't take me for one of those frauds who call themselves prospectors and live like Kafirs, do you?" his host snarled.

By that token Wilmot knew him to be a prospector.



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Abuse and disparagement of each other are the hall-marks of the fraternity. Musicians and actors are a loving brotherhood in comparison.

While the visitor was resting and making his observations, the host was on hands and knees searching for something beneath the bed, bags, boxes, and other impedimenta lying about the floor. After much grunting and cursing at certain wooden-headed Kafirs, Hartley got up, holding a whisky-bottle. He took it to the tent door and tried to gauge the quantity of liquor remaining by holding it to the light.

"That Kafir's been at it," he said, after much shaking and peering at the opaque glass, "but there's a tot left."

He rinsed out two tea-cups by pouring in cold tea from the enamelled pot, and fairly divided the liquor. It was one of those fiery brands which, masquerading behind a reputable label, had done so much to keep down over-population on the Gold Fields. Hartley took his at a gulp. Wilmot had not yet reached that stage at which a man can swallow Johannesburg whisky without wilting, and he was thankful when Hartley suddenly rushed from the tent armed with a sjambok, for it gave him an opportunity to get rid of his poison without offence.

A succession of shrill yells, and oaths in broad Yorkshire, syncopated by the swish of the sjambok, supplied evidence that Hartley was rebuking a Kafir. The exercise lasted half a minute, when the wretched native broke away howling over the veld.

Hartley came back puffing with exertion, and with-

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out a word went to the packing-case cupboard and took out a whisky-bottle. He shook and examined it, remarking quietly. "He's right; he hasn't touched it. Got the wrong bottle."

Wilmot inferred that judgment had been given and execution levied on incomplete evidence.

"Don't matter. Owed him a licking for not rubbing down the horse yesterday," was Hartley's comment as he went outside and shouted in his thunderous bass.

The victim of immatured inference came up limping. With one hand busy rubbing off the marks of the sjambok, and his fishy eyes fixed apprehensively on the big baas, he proceeded to clear the table and prepare a meal.

Hartley meanwhile opened a huge portmanteau, dragged its varied contents out, and without a word put into Wilmot's hand a roll of paper which resolved itself into an illuminated address.

It was a sample of early Rand art, represented by an elaborate and gaudy border, in which unknown or unclassified plants and flowers twined round strange objects intended to symbolise the accessories and implements of the miners' craft, from head-gear and stamp-battery to picks and shovels. Huge letters, almost concealed in an entanglement of multi-coloured free-hand flourishes, set out that Richard Hartley, Esq., M.E., F.C.S., M.R.Geo.S., and Manager of the Golden Star Gold-Mining Company, Limited, had been presented with that testimonial to the affection and regard with which he was held by the employees of the aforesaid company on the occasion of his marriage.



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Wilmot read it through carefully, and duly expressed his admiration both for the art and the sentiment expressed.

"Cost me sixty golden sovereigns," said Hartley, deliberately italicising and punctuating each word.

"Well, surely a good wife is worth it," Wilmot remarked tentatively. He did not quite understand the allusion to the cost. He was under the impression that these things were paid for by the donors.

"Good wife, eh? Didn't have her. Marriage never came off."

Wilmot looked up interrogatively.

"Girl cleared with the wedding presents."

"You were well rid of her, then," Wilmot suggested. Hartley turned on him angrily.

"Don't you say a word against her. My fault. Celebrated marriage too soon. Got too full to be married. Girl wouldn't wait. Never do it again. Keep that thing as warning. Stick it up somewhere when I meet a woman and feel like getting soft on her. Worth sixty golden sovereigns, eh? But never mind the girl, don't want to talk about her; look at *them*, and see who I am."

He indicated the alphabetical procession of honorary initials after his name, and read them out at full length with impressive unction—

"Mining Engineer, Fellow of the Chemical Society, Member of the Rand Geological Society. How many of your bogus prospectors can show a lot like that?" he demanded.

He was still on his knees rummaging the port-

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manteau. Presently he produced a flat parcel wrapped in much-creased newspaper which he unfastened carefully, and handed to Wilmot a photograph.

"That's the girl. Fine face, eh? Man, the loveliest woman God made! Look at her."

It was the photograph of a very ordinary, regular-faced young woman, in a daring stage costume. Wilmot's experienced eye recognised the chorus-girl genus at a glance, but with an energetic six-foot enthusiast demanding admiration, and capable of enforcing it, he deemed it wiser to approve, and did.

"You must know her,—Dolly Vavasour."

Wilmot said he feared he had not that good fortune. Hartley scowled, disappointed.

"Londoner, aren't you? Been to opera and music-halls, I suppose?"

Wilmot assented.

"Then you must know her. Great opera-singer and variety artiste."

Wilmot tried hard not to laugh outright at the incongruous juxtaposition of extremes. Hartley was too serious to laugh at, so Wilmot took refuge in the suggestion that the lady must have made her mark at the time he was absent on the Continent. He repeated his expressions of admiration, hypocritically discovering admirable traits of character in the very commonplace face, and a striking—nay, a painful—resemblance to a girl he once knew who—but that was past.

This audacious dissembling proved an adroit stroke of diplomacy, for Wilmot soon discovered that he had



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touched a sympathetic chord in the heart of this big bluff admixture of shrewdness, simplicity, and vanity. Hartley gradually dropped his staccato sentences and talked freely, even fluently. Like most men whose lives are largely spent in solitude, he compensated for months of enforced dumbness in the veld by opening the sluice-gates of talk in the presence of a sympathetic or tolerant listener, such as he now had.

By the time the meal was finished, and the third tot of whisky poured out, Wilmot knew much of the history of his strangely made host, including the story, half-pathetic, half-humorous, of his infatuation for and betrayal by the fickle Dolly Vavasour. He had seen enough of the mining men, of whom Hartley was a type, to understand, if not appreciate, his brusqueness and freedom of speech, and his embarrassing unreticence on the most delicate and personal matters. To a guarded degree he reciprocated, for he felt an agreeable liking for this unconventional robust character,—the subtle, magnetic influence that strong personalities often exercise over less confident and assertive natures. Besides, there was an even stronger reason,—an impelling desire to believe and confide in him. He had a secret, and no man ever carried one without feeling at times an acute yearning to share it with another.

While Hartley ran garrulously on in his deep diapason, expanding details and emphasising the obvious, after the manner of the undisciplined talker, Wilmot was actively resolving his own position. He recognised fully that a secret such as his required a bold and experienced collaborateur to turn it to practi-



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cal account. The same revolution of Fortune's wheel which had discovered the material had apparently provided the hand to manipulate it in a man who knew the circumstances, the country, the possibilities,—in short, if he were to be trusted, Hartley was the ideal partner for a scheme such as was slowly shaping in Wilmot's brain. He resolved to open out the matter cautiously. There was ample time before his train was due, so he watched and waited for an opening.

It was long in coming, for Hartley's tongue grew looser with successive tots, and the production from the portmanteau of a bundle of reports, letters, and other semi-official records of his past achievements formed the text for a long narration of his successes as mine-manager, prospector, surveyor, and explorer, a narrative interminably extended by his inability to introduce the most casual name without giving the history of the person mentioned. Hartley, like most prospectors, seemed to have been very unfortunate in the selection of his principals or partners, most of them finishing by getting the better of the bargain, or, alternately, preferring the advice of one of his rivals, and consequently ending in disaster. There is a monotonous similarity about the records of South African prospectors.

By dint of careful steering Wilmot at last got the talk into a current easy to deflect into the direction that suited him, and boldly made the deviation by asking Hartley if, among his numerous discoveries,—which appeared to comprise all the extensions of the



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Main Reef, and nine-tenths of the mineral deposits of South Africa,—he had ever come upon any traces of the missing arms of the Reformers.

Hartley had not, but he knew a man who said he had.

“Suppose a man found a quantity, and gave information to the Government, what would he be likely to get?” Wilmot asked.

“Any amount of deferred promises from Pretoria, and a good hiding from every Britisher on the Rand,” was the prompt reply.

Wilmot had not thought of this contingency, and the reward he had pictured abruptly faded, like many a flattering hope.

“I know a man who has found a Maxim gun, but doesn’t know what to do with it.”

His heart beat fast as he made the plunge.

Hartley turned, alert and interested.

“Sure? or only a yarn?”

“Quite sure; I’ve seen it.”

Hartley looked searchingly at the speaker.

“A goon? A Maxim goon?”

“Yes.”

“Any cartridges?”

“Yes.” He gave this assurance more in hope than belief.

“What sort of man found it? Is he straight?”

“Perfectly.”

“Are you in it?”

“Yes.”

Hartley put down his cup of whisky and, punching

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Wilmot's shoulder by way of emphasising his demand for serious attention, asked—

"Do you think I'm straight?"

"That is the impression I have formed of you."

"Yes or No. Speak out; no half measures."

"Yes; I am satisfied you are," Wilmot answered, and he meant it.

"Put it there then." Hartley held out a great hand, and Wilmot put his into it. If there is character in a hearty grip, there could be no doubt about the honesty of Richard Hartley.

"If your friend *has* found a Maxim goon,"—he italicised the verb,—“and let's me come in with him and you, his fortune's made, your fortune, mine—all of us.”

He got up and walked excitedly in and out of the tent, then gripped Wilmot by the shoulder—

"Are you quite sure about it? Man, it's such a big thing I can hardly believe it's true."

"Quite. I am the man, and you are the only other person so far as I know who is in it."

Hartley stared at Wilmot incredulously for several moments without speaking, then he said, very gravely—

"Before you tell me any more say whether you are ready to let me stand in, and to do what I advise. Mind, I tell you it's a big thing, bigger than you can guess, and there's big risk in my scheme, but there's a certain fortune at the end of it. Now don't give yourself away if you have any doubts about me." He paused. "God, how I wish you knew me!"

"I'm quite satisfied, and prepared to act as you



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advise," said Wilmot, "so I am going to tell you the whole story of myself and my find."

And he did, keeping back no detail.

Hartley listened patiently, rarely interrupting. At the end of the narrative he grasped Wilmot's hand.

"Stand by me, and I'll stand by you," he said earnestly. "It's my turn to talk now. I know where I can sell that goon for a half-pint measure full of diamonds—Kimberley stones, all of the best, twenty thousand pounds' worth if a penny. But I won't deceive you; it's a touch-and-go business. It's goon-running. Do you know what that means?"

"Something serious, I believe."

"Well, if ten years in jail is serious, it is that; but so is a fortune of ten thousand apiece serious."

Hartley filled up his pipe and settled himself to tell his plans for the winning of that fortune. It was a long discursive narrative, as his recitals always were, except when he was firing off staccato sentences to make conversation. Reduced to what Hartley would call a parcel for handling, his story was this:—

A few years before, he had been in the north-east corner of the Transvaal, a remote and little-known district over which a remarkable chief named Magato held undisputed sway, the sole unconquered and independent native ruler within the geographical boundaries of Boerdom. He had always and successfully defied the authority claimed by the Transvaal Government, and had kept his territory free from the intrusion of the emissaries of progress in the shape of prospectors, concession-hunters, missionaries, and

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rum. Although a recluse in his native fastnesses, he had not been ignorant of what was going on among neighbouring tribes, and he realised to the full the precept handed down to him by his father, "When white man comes, black man goes," and he had resolved that, if effort could prevent it, the eating up of his people by the whites should not happen during his life. Nature had helped him to preserve his isolation wondrously. Many years ago a small settlement of Transvaal Boers, who got a lodgment in the country, were wiped out by the malarial fever that haunts the low-lying ground on the borders of the Limpopo, and the story had passed into a tradition of terror. Not a Boer was seen in the country for forty years. Then the reports of a stray wanderer, that the Magatse were numerous as the sands of the sea and rich in flocks and herds, tempted the Pretoria Government to send a small expedition to collect the arrears of hut-tax which had never yet been paid. "Slim" Piet Joubert was intrusted with the mission.

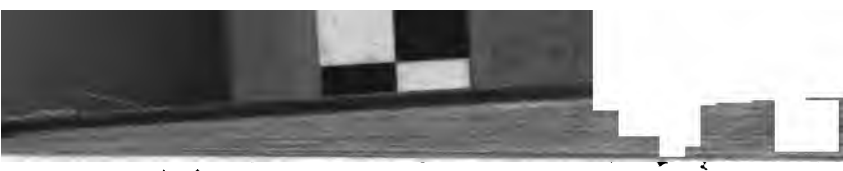
"Are you Paul Kruger?" demanded Magato.

The general explained that he was but a sort of headman to that potentate.

"Go back," said the chief. "Tell Paul Kruger I do not have dealings with indunas. If he wishes to talk to me, let him come himself."

From that day Magato was left in undisturbed possession of his beautiful country, fenced by the fever-haunted Limpopo, the inhospitable mountains of the Murchison Range, and the terror inspired by a





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truculent chief who had the courage of his convictions, and had not hesitated to tie up to his own waggon and flog a trader who foolishly ventured into the forbidden land with a load of liquor.

But despite precautions, now and then a bold Boer would look on the fruitful land from a distance and return, like the spies of Joshua, with glowing reports to his countrymen, with the result that tentative efforts were made by adventurous Europeans to get a footing in the region. Early in the chapter Magato had granted leave to two or three desirables to establish stores for the benefit of the natives, and they enjoyed and grew rich on a monopoly that was the envy of every trader in South Africa. Their visits to civilisation were few, one of them, the richest and most influential, not having left his place for a quarter of a century. Hartley had gone up as the *protégé* of this favourite of royalty, and during a stay of several weeks had learned something that had inspired his dreams ever since.

"He was hungering for a machine-gun when I was there," said Hartley. "He had begun to get fearful through the attempts of white men to force themselves on him, and he knew that sooner or later he would have to defend his country against the Boers. He had tried to get a gun up through his traders; but they have been so long away from white men that they didn't know how to set to work. I hear his son 'Mpefu, who is chief now, is quite as keen on getting a machine-gun, and is prepared to give a calabash of diamonds for one."

"Where do the stones come from?" Wilmot inquired.

"Not from the country, but from Kimberley. Many of his Kafirs go to the mines to work, and when they return they often make the chief a present of a stolen diamond. Most of these Kafir chiefs have thousands of stones got in this way, and all South Africans know it, and have their eyes on them; but these Kafirs are no fools—they know the value of the stones as well as we do, and, what is more, they know how to take care of them."

Hartley went on to explain that as soon as he had verified the exact nature of Wilmot's discovery he would despatch a messenger to 'Mpefu, now the reigning chief, and find out if the ambition of the dead chief was his. He had no doubt what the answer would be; the only difficulty was the delivery of the gun.

"And now you know all about the market for the goods, let us see the samples," said he; and they arranged to visit the cutting as soon as the Kafirs of the camp were asleep.

"We shall have to do our own work," he explained, "for this secret is too important to trust to a nigger."

It was ten o'clock before Hartley deemed it safe to collect the few tools necessary and leave the camp.

Half an hour later they stood in the cutting with a Maxim gun and twenty boxes of ammunition gladdening their eyes.

"I can read this business like a book," said Hartley, when he had exhausted his vocabulary of expressions of delight. "This goon has been found where it was



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first hidden, which I reckon was somewhere on the East Rand, and has been brought here by the finder. That means we are not alone in this secret. A thing like this is not likely to be left long unguarded. The chances are that some one over in the Dorp yonder is keeping an eye on this spot, so we must be sharp and get the lot away to my camp. There are a dozen ready-made cuttings there where we can hide it safely."

The gun itself was no great weight, but the ammunition, which Hartley estimated at a hundred thousand rounds, was a formidable load, and would require several journeys of the cart. Wilmot was left in charge of the treasure while his companion returned to camp for the means of transport. He killed the long waiting by replacing the canvas covering on the gun. Whoever had originally done the work knew his business. The metal work had been well oiled and covered with some preservative, and the various parts carefully marked and numbered for refitting, and arranged in parcels of a convenient size for handling. The cartridges were contained in twenty stout boxes about eighteen inches square, and each required the strength of two men to lift, the whole find weighing little short of two tons, which would have to be removed in small loads by a one-horse cart over the roadless rugged veld.

Wilmot's jubilation cooled as he realised the magnitude of the task that had to be performed in a space of time that was dangerously brief, for the night was short and Kafir eyesight long.

The silence and solitude excited his nerves, and

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imagination magnified the gentle whispering of the wind into the swish of footsteps in the long grass. He went outside and peered through the darkness, but saw only the feeble glow in the atmosphere from the electric lights of the mines, and heard the sullen rumble of the never-ceasing battery stamps two miles away, like the moan of sea waves on a shingly shore. A long weary hour passed before he heard the welcome sound of wheels in the distance. Hartley arrived with the cart, and the work of loading up began.

The eastern horizon had turned amber before the fourth and last load was on its way to camp, and an early Kafir or two were driving in cattle from their grazing-ground near the Dorp when the cart with its illicit load was climbing the ridge that hid its goal.

Once on his own ground, Hartley showed none of the perturbation that he had manifested during the progress of the transportation. He called up his Kafirs to help to bury the cases in a cutting, explaining that dynamite was dangerous after sunrise, and that deep burial was the only safeguard against explosion—an explanation amply sufficing to account for the night's work, for the natives' terror of dynamite is universal among all who had worked on mines.

A few hours' sleep and a late breakfast, augmented by a bottle of whisky procured from the Dorp, fitted both men for a quiet discussion of the plan of campaign, that, when put into operation, was to alter the course of their lives. Hartley had all the details ready, much to the surprise of Wilmot, for he was not aware that the running of a gun had for years



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been one of the schemes that occupied the imaginative periods of his partner's dreams, or that he had long been prepared with every necessary save the gun. The materialising of that had, in truth, come much more as a pleasure than a surprise, as is generally true of such cheerful optimists as he. It is an article of their faith that fortune must come soon or late; the manner and form of its coming interests them but little.

He then settled down to the consideration of ways and means with business-like address.

"This business, like every other, needs money to start it," said Hartley. "I have figured it out that by the time we start our trek northwards we shall have to handle at least a couple of hundred pounds. You have nothing; I have very little more than you. I shall be on this job about eight weeks longer, and if I am lucky and good, and keep away from the Dorp, I shall leave with about a hundred pounds. In the meantime I shall find you a job, so that if you don't save anything you won't have to live on our capital. By the end of three months something is certain to have turned up, for I can see my luck is in."

"What do you mean by our capital?" Wilmot asked. "I have nothing."

"Aren't we partners?" Hartley demanded. "What I may have is as much yours now as mine. Haven't you found the goon? That's your part of the contract; mine is to get it to where it will do the most good. I don't suppose you are likely to earn a couple

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of hundred pounds before the rust has swallowed the brass. You're not built of money-making stuff; I know 'em."

Wilmot yielded to the persuasions of his partner, and stayed with him for three or four days.

"You may as well see the best side of me while I'm wearing it," said Hartley. "Next time I may be running amok, and you'd be sorry you trusted me. But I don't think I shall. A thing like this keeps a man upright. Wish I had a sweetheart now. No, I don't; I should be running over to her and talking. Never tell your schemes to a woman, Wilmot. You look such a fool when they miss."

During the few days' companionship Wilmot studied his partner closely, for he had much of that penetrative eye for character that is supposed to be the special attribute of refined and sensitive natures. He found nothing that did not confirm his first-formed impression that in Dick Hartley he had met a man in every sense of the word, whose rugged virtues far outweighed the one vice too common in his class to be stigmatised or too seriously condemned. That Hartley was far his own superior in that worldly knowledge, acumen, and pushfulness that make for success in an elementary community such as the Rand Wilmot was convinced. The dogmatic assertiveness and impatience of contradiction which were the man's most pronounced characteristics often outraged his friend's more refined notions of conducting a controversy, but he readily forgave this. Wilmot had learnt very early in his Johannesburg experience



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that sensitiveness was a troublesome and useless exotic to cultivate in a country where the graces of life are regarded as evidences of effeminacy; so he submitted philosophically to have his most tender spots abraded by the brutal but honest criticisms of his rough companion. After all, the ordeal was not so very trying.

Hartley was one of those fortunate men who had the knack of saying offensive things inoffensively, therefore Wilmot made no pretence of being hurt when, on the eve of his departure for Johannesburg, his partner counted out nine pounds and curtly ordered him to put them into his pocket and be careful how he spent them.

"That's exactly half of all I have," he said. "By the time that's gone I shall have put you in the way of earning something for yourself."

He drove Wilmot to Krugersdorp and saw him off at the station; then pulled up at his pet canteen, "just to drink luck to the goon."

The horse and cart were found at daybreak anchored in a garden fence, while the owner slept stertorously but soundly in the porch of the Dutch Reformed Church.



CHAPTER III.

IN TOWN.

FOR the first time since he had been compelled to share the dingy bedroom at the Imperial International Hotel, Wilmot entered it without feeling that spasm of depression and repugnance that always came on the waft of stuffy uncleanly air that followed on the opening of the door.

As he removed his clothes, and made preparations for the sluice down that was the nearest approach to a tubbing the wretched place afforded, he regarded their increasing shabbiness with genuine amusement. He felt something of the pride of external disreputability that induces some millionaires to affect seedy raiment. Very shortly he would be in a position to gratify any whim in matters sartorial, and he could well afford to despise the snobbery that gauged a man by the blatant advertisement of expensive tailorware. It was a new and novel experience, for up till that day he had been compelled to make concession to vulgar prejudice in this respect, and had often felt himself secretly envying, and even respecting, the young lions of Judah who seemed to enjoy the mon-



opoly of well-cut clothes in Johannesburg. But a new day had dawned; he was discarding the old for the new, and, with his old clothes, he felt that he was casting away that sick heartache, the anxious thought for the morrow, that during the past month or two had robbed life of its zest, and almost convinced him, as it often does the young and inexperienced, that the only true philosophy of life is that of the pessimist. To-day he laughed at his past folly as he dressed himself carefully, resolved to lunch at the Grand Hotel, if only to place himself once more in touch with the prosperous crowd with whom he had ruffled it in the days of his exuberant greenness six months before.

The excellent meal put him in a sympathetic humour with all the world, and within a few hours he had assimilated the spirit of happy-go-lucky optimism that was in the rarefied atmosphere of the Rand.

And was there not ample justification for the faith in luck that was the creed of every adventurer who waited on it? Again and again during his short experience had he not seen the shabby cadger for a cheap drink suddenly discarding beer for champagne on the strength of a lucky stroke? The record of almost every magnate of the day was a confirmation of the pleasant theory that to every man upon the Reef luck cometh soon or late. This faith it was that alone enabled the unfortunate, and often incapable, ne'er-do-well to sleep soundly while his landlord, with overdue board bill, rapped angrily at the door, and thickened his skin when the barman brutally re-

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fused to give credit for "just one more round." Whence or how the good thing was to come these waiters on the tide in the affairs of men had but the shadowiest notion. It depressed or discouraged them little to know that they had neither part nor lot in the money-making swim; it was sufficient that they were in the backwash of the current, into which the slightest change in the wind might sweep them, to race neck and neck with the foremost swimmers. So they waited on, while credit and clothes grew more threadbare, and looked on the luck of others as the subaltern notes the promotion of his senior, seeing in it a reminder that their turn was somehow brought a step nearer.

The lunch was followed up by an expensive dinner from the best menu the town provided. It was true, Wilmot thought as he paid the waiter, Hartley had counselled strict prudence and economy; but surely the special circumstances warranted the extravagance? It was a Rand axiom that a stroke of luck should be celebrated by extra indulgence, particularly after a period of privation. He could and would atone by ascetic abstention from luxury during the coming week, but for this once he must "let go." And he did. The gregarious instinct that asserts itself in such natures as his, when Fortune smiles, impelled him to seek out and play the generous host to one like himself, but who was still waiting on the turn of Fortune's wheel.

When Wilmot struck a balance next morning he was a little bit surprised and ashamed to find that



he had reduced his capital account of nine pounds to less than half. He carried out his plan of atonement next day by denying himself several indulgences on which he had set his heart, and quietened his conscience with the reflection that, after all, he had been spending his own money, for Hartley's contribution was part of the premium paid for admission to a lucrative partnership.

Before the second day was over, Wilmot was provided with another confirmation of the comforting faith in his change of luck. Dale Ellis, the companion of his overnight celebration, looked him up, excited and boisterous, flourishing a bank draft for fifty pounds.

"Always stick to your mother, old chap. It pays. The governor has chucked me and closed the loan department, but the old lady couldn't stand my tears. She's managed to scrape another fifty, unknown to the old man, and I'm a millionaire again for a week. Let's go out and see civilisation."

"Don't forget that charity begins at home," Wilmot suggested.

"Oh, that fiver you lent me. That's all right. Come with me and melt this bit of paper."

They went to the bank together, and spent the rest of the day in melting the auriferous product of the draft. Ellis repaid the borrowed five pounds, and Wilmot felt the least he could do by way of recognising the honesty of the borrower was to pay for two dinners, and stalls at the theatre. Ellis reciprocated by buying five pounds' worth of tickets in the sweep-

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stake on the forthcoming big race at Johannesburg, giving one to Wilmot; then spent ten pounds in replenishing his always opulent wardrobe, and called at a photographer's to make arrangements for an elaborate portrait of himself in riding costume on a polo pony.

"Seven pounds a dozen is an awful price to pay for a photograph to give away," Ellis remarked, "but it's money well invested; it'll show the folks at home that I am apparently doing well. Never plead poverty to people you expect something from. 'To him that hath, much shall be given.' Wonderfully true book, the Bible."

"Except when you want to borrow a bit," corrected Wilmot, who was young in the ways of the world.

"That's where you make a mistake. When you want to borrow for absolute necessities, put on your best clothes and a half-crown cigar and ask for a hundred if twenty will do. Nobody believes in the shabby man who wants a sovereign; he's disreputable and done for. The man who asks for a hundred on his P. N. is respectable, and retains his self-respect. I'm going round to my hotel man to swagger this cash and this three-guinea panama hat and bluff him into letting his account stand over. If he thought I had nothing, he'd be adamant; but the sight of these quids and the bottle of champagne I shall stand him will soften his heart and dust his eyes."

Wilmot did not know, neither did Ellis tell him, that he had obtained the fifty pounds by working on the maternal sympathy, describing himself pathetically



as on the verge of homelessness and starvation, unless he could conciliate a stony-hearted landlord; that profitable employment befitting a gentleman had been offered him, which he would have to decline unless he could make a presentable appearance, hinting that he was becoming positively unfit for decent society because of his increasing shabbiness, a plea he well knew would appeal to the feminine instinct almost as effectively as the picture of himself lying foodless and bedless in the gutter.

Ellis was a magnificent specimen of the remittance-man, a species that is the byword of every British colony he infests and infects. He had, however, contrived to escape inclusion in that category, adroitly concealing his impecuniosity by consummate skill in the art of keeping up appearances. The same selfish audacity that enabled him to bleed and befool a foolishly fond and confiding mother carried him gaily through Rand society. Destitute of any capacity of marketable value, and spurning the idea of work with the robust contempt of the hardened tramp, he somehow managed to keep afloat amid a set, financially superior, who, despite their shrewdness and keen scent for a fraud, accepted Ellis at his own valuation, partially convinced by the fact that he had not yet gone under. A couple of years as a frequenter of the fast resorts of the West End of London had qualified him for the rôle of leader and authority in a certain clique in Johannesburg, among whom his up-to-date manner, his faultless dressing, his man-of-the-world *aplomb*, and a remarkable versatility in the accomplishments that

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count for ability among "sportsmen," excited admiration, and made him a general favourite. His flamboyant Irish nature had the usual effect upon his duller associates, and no one knew better than he that the man who can amuse and excel in the trifles admired by men can always command a front place and the reputation of a "splendid fellow." He played upon his knowledge of human nature for all it was worth, and Wilmot was completely under his spell. Although at times the gross selfishness and want of principle in the man outraged Wilmot's less cauterised conscience, he was neither strong nor energetic enough to reproach or resent. "No one comes here for the benefit of his health," was Ellis's favourite quotation; "so do all you can and whoever you can while you can."

The Johannesburg of that day presented a very limited range of rational amusement to men of the type of Wilmot and Ellis, and the social life appealed to them less. There was too much of the snobbery of the *nouveau riche* among the women, too much transference of the office to the drawing-room among the men. Except in the German and upper class Jewish community, who were exclusive, and to a degree artistic, the graces of life were only known in the form of an occasional ostentatious dinner or dance; outdoor amusements were few and far between. The canteen or the bars of the better class hotels were still the principal resorts of the many who had not the *entrée* to the club, where a heavy entrance-fee and a cliqueish ballot kept out all who had not the hallmark of a big banking account, or the means of helping



others to increase theirs. There was, therefore, little left but the music-halls and an occasional visit to the theatre, when a fairly good company offered sufficient attraction. Sport, so called, was the universal panacea for ennui, and races in being or in future, glove contests between third-rate bruisers, cards and billiards, were sandwiched between much bar-loafing and worship at the shrine of the Commissioner Street Hebe, who never before had occupied so exalted a position in a civilised community, nor played so important and considerable a part in the affairs of men of action.

Want of means rather than of inclination had for some months kept Wilmot from the haunts of the "sports," and vanity, begotten of the consciousness of his financial condition, had caused him to avoid the few reputable houses where heretofore he had kept up his claim to respectability by joining the narrow and pretentious circle. The appearance of Ellis, and the inspiriting confidence in the good time that was dawning for himself, helped him to throw off his reserve and, as he expressed it, compensate for past deprivations by "spreading himself out a bit." But thirty pounds—the united capital of the pair—did not spread far in the Johannesburg of that halcyon period of cheap money and high prices. The end of a week of indulgence found him in much the same position as on the day he had set out for the West Rand, save that, though he owed more, he was able to look at the future with the eye of hope. He had resumed meals at a cheap restaurant, and sought to kill time amid surround-

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ings calling for the smallest output of cash, and was one day planning an appeal to the financial reserve of Hartley when a note pencilled on the back of a bill of fare was brought to him by a Kafir messenger, announcing the presence of the subject of his thoughts at the Grand National Hotel. Thither Wilmot promptly travelled, and found Hartley celebrating his return to civilisation and bad whisky by treating a crowd of loafers to whatever they chose to call for. He was not yet far advanced in the exuberant stage, therefore able to observe a degree of commendable reserve and diplomacy in his greeting. He seized an early opportunity for a quiet business talk, in which he announced the premature closing down of the work at Krugersdorp, owing to his too honest report to the syndicate.

"I've got less than fifty pounds with me," said he, "and must find another job. Meantime I've fixed you up. 'Cyanide Sam' will be here presently to settle with you. How much money have you got?"

Rather shamefacedly Wilmot confessed that he was bankrupt.

"Been playing the giddy goat—I know, don't lie about it. Not going to preach. Been on a bust myself for three days, but we've both got to stop it right here. Here's Sam."

A thick-set, carelessly dressed, jovial-looking man of about sixty had entered the bar, accompanied by a retinue of hangers-on, whom Wilmot recognised as familiar jackals to certain financial lions. He



also knew this lion by sight. He was a well-known character on the Rand, one of the few fortunate pioneers of the industry, who had contrived to keep a good share of his discoveries, which had all been floated, and were now in varying stages, from the rudimentary to the paying. Sam had got his name through his strenuous advocacy of the cyanide process of recovering gold from waste slimes at a time when it was new and strange, and therefore ridiculous. No one knew exactly how he stood financially. His interests were so scattered, and his propensity for exaggeration and optimism so well known, that few took him seriously, and he felt a childish delight in mystifying the crowd. The same issue of the paper would report his being sued for a small account, and the purchase or sale by him of claims worth thousands. He defied diagnosis, and might be worth a quarter of a million in pounds or pence only. He was one of the old school of mining men — illiterate, shrewd, ostentatious when in luck, incredibly mean when not, yet overweeningly vain of the exaggerated reputation he enjoyed for goodheartedness — a reputation that would have cost a less astute man much to maintain. Sam never parted with cash except under pressure, a fact to which the records of the civil court bore ample testimony; but he would take real pains to secure work for a man to whom he had promised his aid, generally at the expense of others. Many were the stories told of his sending two or three *protégés* to take charge of some one of the embryonic properties in which he was interested, the rivals fight-



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ing for supremacy on the spot, and ending by appealing to the law courts for redress. As Sam rarely refused his help, he was constantly involved in some imbroglio brought about by his indiscriminating generosity. Fortunately he was fairly free from such complications just now, and Hartley had taken the precaution to prospect the ground before accepting the nomination of Wilmot as storekeeper and general assistant of the Resurgam Mine on the West Rand,—a property that, after half a dozen promising starts and abrupt suspensions, was again being overhauled preparatory to amalgamation with a neighbouring and equally disappointing company.

Hartley had shown his intimate knowledge of Rand methods, and those of Cyanide Sam in particular, by insisting on a formal letter appointing Wilmot to the post. Sam's usual authorisation took the form of a curt note or merely his sprawling signature scribbled on the applicant's card, the back of a used envelope, or even of a wine card. He had an up-to-date office supplied with all the accessories of a business bureau, from brass name-plate to typewriter and telephone, but he rarely used it, preferring to do his business at his favourite bar, or, if strict privacy were essential, in the box of the hall-porter or the middle of the stairs. He loathed the formality of lawyer-drawn agreements, and to a very great extent he owed his success to his reputation as a man who never went back on his word,—though he generally took his own time in fulfilling a compact. The superiority of modern methods over those of the days of shirt-



sleeves and Cape brandy had been brought home to him by several adverse verdicts in actions for breach of agreement, so that pressure, judicially applied, would sometimes extract from him a properly attested agreement, and this Hartley had secured for his friend.

"Now, I must find my banker," said he, when several rounds of drinks had sealed the bargain.

Hartley led the way to a Commissioner Street bar.

The siren in charge greeted him with a friendly "Hullo! Cecil Rhodes," and a polite inquiry as to what jail he had been staying in so long.

"Didn't I tell you all about myself last night? Give us drinks and my money?"

"What money?" The girl seemed genuinely ignorant.

"The money I gave you last night to take care of."

"This is the first time I've seen you for six months," the young lady asseverated. "You were not here last night." And she appealed to the barman for confirmation, which he gave.

Hartley did not press his claim, merely remarking, "Wonder where I did leave it?"

The girl suggested various probabilities, and the course of the conversation revealed to Wilmot a new eccentricity in the character of his partner. It appeared that it was his custom, when feeling himself growing unequal to the responsibility of carrying money, to hand it over to the care of some friendly barmaid. If he lost it, he explained to Wilmot, it



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was not because of the dishonesty of the trustee, but through his inability to recollect next day who the trustee was.

They visited half a dozen bars before she was discovered. The girl handed over forty pounds, with a suggestion that she deserved a fiver for saving the lot, for, said she, "I'm sure you don't remember giving it to me."

Hartley admitted it, and paid over the banker's commission, as the girl called it. She accepted it in as matter-of-course a manner as she took the half-crown tendered for the drinks. Presents of fivers to her class were too common to provoke more than a bare "Thanks." Effusive gratitude was reserved for diamond bracelets or the cheque that defrayed half the cost of a trip to the homeland.

"You'll have to manage with a tenner," said Hartley. "I thought I had more than this; but I must have thrown it about last night. I know I had about eighty pounds when I left Krugersdorp."

He began a futile effort to prick off his course since he arrived in Johannesburg. The record was made up of the names of men met, with guesses at the bar at which the meeting was celebrated, and modest estimates of the amount expended. The liquor bill was reckoned in shillings, yet the balance to be accounted for approximated thirty pounds, the largest lump contributions to which that Hartley could clearly remember being fifteen shillings for shirt, collar, and tie, and thirty shillings for dinner at the Gold-Fields Hotel.



"I'll write the rest off as out-of-pockets and petty cash," said he, "and that will save worry."

Next morning Hartley presented himself at Wilmot's room soon after breakfast. He was obviously still under the influence of a very wet night, but carefully, even well dressed. As he sat talking to Wilmot, his big fingers were frequently raised to his neck, and his companion noticed that, though perfectly groomed in every other respect, his stiff white linen collar was a size too small, and the frequent adjustments were necessary to prevent its pinching the piece of red skin that showed between collar and shirt-band. Wilmot directed attention to the fault.

"Know it. My patent for keeping a man straight. Got to sober up to-day to see directors and things."

"But how does a tight collar keep you straight?" Wilmot inquired.

"Pinches me when I throw my head back to drink. Splendid reminder; you try it."

He was enlarging on the advantages of his check on superfluous drinking when Dale Ellis entered. The exuberant young man was unusually depressed, and Wilmot guessed aright when he read in the subdued manner the preliminary to an attempt to borrow.

"Who's your friend?" asked Hartley in his gruffest and rudest tone, before Wilmot could introduce them. He had stared hard at the new-comer, and instinctively took a dislike to the overdressed and rather supercilious youth. He had all the antipathy of the old stager for the well-dressed town man, for he illogically

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associated such with the class of idlers or middlemen who had mostly benefited by his own hard work.

"What do you do?" he demanded, when Wilmot had answered the brusque question.

"Try to enjoy myself," answered the Irishman flipantly, for the instantaneous dislike was mutual.

"Thought so. Useful sort of creature. Live on your private means, I suppose?"

Ellis flushed angrily and rose from the bed.

"Coming?" he inquired of Wilmot, jerking his head towards the door.

"Not with you; he's fixed up with me," Hartley answered.

"Didn't know he had a baas," said Ellis, as he got outside.

"Strikes me you're the sort that requires a baas but can't get one," was Hartley's parting shot as Ellis disappeared.

"Is that the sort of thing you go about with?" he demanded.

Wilmot attempted a lame apology for his friend, who, he said, was not a bad sort.

"Bad for you anyhow; know the breed too well. Told him anything?"

Wilmot winced, and uttered an emphatic "No fear."

"Hope not. Anyhow, off you go to the mine to-day. This is no place for you."

He helped Wilmot to pack his baggage, interviewed the landlord, and bullied him into making a liberal rebate on the account, ordered a cab, and the pair



went off stationwards by a circuitous route necessitated by calls at various canteens for final drinks.

When Wilmot had been bestowed in a carriage Hartley found there was time for another final at the refreshment-bar.

"This must be my last," said he,—“collar pinches. Got to pull myself together. There's a meeting of the Geological Society to-night. That humbug Barker is going to read a paper on Extension of the Main Reef. Collared my theories. If I go there full up I shall fight him and get suspended. Happened twice. Got to consider my reputation. I'm going to smash his theories.”

“Not very logical if, as you say, they are your own,” Wilmot suggested.

“Theories are no good on the Rand till the capitalists prove them, and then they prove something else,—that the original discoverer never had anything to do with them. I'm quite satisfied to let Barker claim to be the Columbus. I can come in after he's smashed up. This is an upside-down country, as you'll find. Quite sure you haven't claimed to be the original discoverer of—a goon?”

“Certain.”

“Don't believe you; but keep your mouth closed in future. It's lucky for us that so many liars say they have found what we have.”

The train moved off before Wilmot could reassert his innocence of the charge. Perhaps it was as well, for he could not have done it with a calm and quiet conscience. An inquisitive companion, a good dinner,

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and unlimited whisky are not conducive to caution in a young man possessed of a valuable secret.

The pinching collar and that bulldog resolution which—except when diluted with whisky—was a prominent characteristic of Hartley, kept him straight for the rest of the day. He had an interview with the members of his syndicate, to whom he gave much valuable advice, supplementing his written report by statements so damning to the prospects of the enterprise that it was easy to understand why the outspoken honesty of the man prejudiced him among mining speculators, who preferred a more complacent optimism in their advisers. Hartley was not of the conciliatory and “promising” type. He had missed many a lucrative engagement by asserting his belief in the worthlessness of the proposition before signing any agreement.

“I’ve got my reputation to consider,” he would say; “and I can’t afford to be associated with a failure.”

But despite this eclecticism, it had been his fate to have the control of several promising ventures that had earned the name of gold-mine only by reason of the amount of coined metal put into them. Hartley had made, however, one conspicuous hit by doing what the mining opinion of the Rand had pronounced impossible. He had made a small property pay on an output of seven pennyweights to the ton, and that at a time when anything below twelve or fifteen was not considered worth the trouble of looking at. True he had never since approached that



irreducible minimum, but that one victory he considered atoned for the dozen failures that had followed. But the mining magnates who provide the motive-power do not so easily wipe out and forget the record of expensive failures, and Hartley was ticked on their notebooks as an honest and capable but unlucky man. The consequences were beginning to show themselves in the form of long intervals of rest between engagements, which he filled by spells of hard work in prospecting on his own account, when he could raise the necessary funds; or by running up big liquor scores at his favourite hotels when compelled to lie idle. His character for probity ensured him credit wherever he was known, for he was a profitable customer on whom it paid to wait.

His luck was in this day. Before dinner-time he had fixed up an engagement to verify for another syndicate certain results brought in by a discredited prospector from the East Rand, a fee of one hundred pounds being promised for work that would occupy him under a month.

He also put in an appearance at the meeting of the Geological Society, and submitted poor Barker to a withering cross-examination that almost provoked that gentleman to a physical retort, and certainly played havoc with his theories in the opinion of his fellow-members.

For two days Hartley went about Johannesburg in a soft collar.



CHAPTER IV.

ON THE RESURGAM.

THE Resurgam Mine was within two hours' drive of Krugersdorp, the volatile history-making headquarters of aggressive young Afrikanderdom, and the centre of the West Rand mining industry.

Wilmot found at the railway-station a young Burgher who had taken to cab-driving. He agreed to transport him and his baggage to the mine for little more than half the value of one of the horses; and, what is more surprising, kept to his bargain, being simple and new to the business.

The Resurgam had the desolate, straggling appearance common to all mining properties. There was the usual Eiffel Tower-like timber head-gear over the shaft, several buildings of corrugated iron which served as managerial offices, residences for employees, and store-rooms, and a large compound for the natives, capable of accommodating five hundred, but occupied by less than a dozen. The mine had never reached the producing stage; there was no battery-house, and the only visible machinery was the now silent engine that did such pumping or hauling as was

necessary. Wilmot knew sufficient of mining matters to recognise that the property was being awakened from its periodical sleep. Heaps of timber and mining material recently delivered lay about, and an ox-waggon laden with timber was being off-loaded by six Kafirs with that deliberate ease that enables one to realise that the man who invented the phrase "works like a nigger" was a humourist who has been taken seriously. They suspended their work to look at the new arrival, and having lifted four ten-feet poles in half an hour, sat down for the usual rest and snuff.

Wilmot saw no sign of the engineer in charge, to whom he had a letter of introduction, so leaving his baggage outside a closed iron shanty labelled on the door "Manager," he prospected round, and made mental notes of the expensive wreckage in the shape of unused and rusted mining gear lying grass-grown about, representing part of the thousands of pounds of shareholders' money that go to lay the foundation of a "promising" property.

Sounds of hammering from one of the larger iron buildings, whose few windows were boarded up, drew Wilmot towards it.

"Hullo, there!" he shouted.

The hammering ceased, and Wilmot repeated his hail. Presently the door was opened a few inches, and the face of a white man became dimly visible at the crack.

"Are you M'Queen?" asked Wilmot.

The man came out without answering, cautiously

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squeezing himself through the smallest space, then carefully shutting and locking the door. There was a suggestion of mystery about the proceedings that provoked curiosity. The man looked Wilmot up and down before replying deliberately in the accent of a southern Scotsman—

“I am Adam M'Queen, and who might you be?”

Wilmot produced and presented his letter, and while M'Queen was slowly reading it, looked him well over. He was a slightly built, grey-faced, grey-bearded man, near sixty, with bushy eyebrows, high cheek-bones, and piercing eyes that gave to his face an alert intelligent expression. It was a face which men would describe as strong and women as surly and forbidding.

“The boss has said nothing to me about this,” he said when he had read the letter. “But it doesn't matter. I daresay he has forgotten it by this time. I hope he won't forget your cheque at the end of the month, or that you will require feeding. There's nothing to eat here, and I don't know how you're going to sleep; there are nae clothes for the bed. For that matter, I don't know what you're going to do. Help me, eh?” This to an interpellation by Wilmot. “My work requires nae assistance. Helps are nuisances.”

The man's manner was gruff, but it was the gruffness of the chronic grumbler rather than of the unfriendly person. Wilmot had given up judging Rand-mining men by their words and manner.

He answered cheerfully that he had no doubt he



would find something to do, while, as to accommodation, he was an Englishman, and could adapt himself to circumstances.

Adam looked at him sharply.

"That speech shows you're an Englishman reet enough. You all think you're vara clever at adapting yoursels, but, man, you're wide o' the mark. Don't you know that if there's one thing an Englishman canna do it's adapt himself to circumstances? He tries to adapt the circumstances, and gets knocked over. Look at these iron buildings,—red-hot in summer and refrigerators in winter,—all put up by Englishmen in a climate where the hoose should be the furrst conseederation. Is that adapting himself to circumstances? No, sir; an Englishman would wear his overcoat in Hades if he arrived there in winter, and a top-hat on boardd ship if it weren't that he's afraid of being laughed at."

Adam spoke with almost savage earnestness, punctuating his sentences with a jerk of his head. Wilmot recognised that he had to deal with a dogmatist of the most pronounced type, and resolved to humour and conciliate him.

"Then let's hope I may prove the exception to the rule," he remarked, as M'Queen concluded his speech with a series of final nods.

"Exception to the rule! How can it be a rule if there are exceptions? You may as well say that a man is always healthy except when he's ill, or that a country is hot when it is not cold. You English are shocking logicians."

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"What's the chance of getting something to eat?" asked Wilmot, anxious to change the subject.

"Vara little. Don't think I've more than a bite for mysel', and I don't feed till dark. I'm wasting good daylight now. Man, but I'm vara busy," and he turned to the locked door, against which he had been standing as if mounting guard and fearing an attempt at forcible entry.

Wilmot apologised for wasting M'Queen's time, and suggested he might help to make up for it by lending a hand. The old man replied almost viciously—

"I tell you no one can help me. Mine's vara special worruk. If you want to wait—and if you tak' my advice you'd catch the next train—go to the office and sit a bit. I'll come in presently, and maybe I'll scratch up a bit meal."

Wilmot took the hint and retired to the office. M'Queen watched him till out of sight, then opened the door of his mysterious workshop, and slipped in with a backward glance, as if fearful of being seen in the act.

The office consisted of three rooms, each about twelve feet square. One was evidently used as office, dining-, and living-room combined; a second was furnished as a bedroom, and contained a stretcher-bed and the ever-present packing-case table; the third was unoccupied and bare. The office was fairly well furnished, and had on the whole that untidiness that bespeaks occupation with easy comfort. The match-boarded walls were covered with maps, plans, photographs of machinery, printed copies of mine regulations,



cuttings from newspapers, and written memoranda. A couple of shelves were well filled with technical and scientific books, all marked with the name of Adam M'Queen. The addresses appended were those of nearly half the mines on the Rand, betokening many changes of venue.

Wilmot deposited his baggage in the empty room and sat down to kill time with his pipe and the volumes. As he examined them he grew interested, for they bulged with loose notes, plans, and drawings that gave evidence of the work of a careful and methodical student of mechanics. A two-foot-high pile of the technical journals of England and America indicated that Adam kept himself abreast of the progress of his profession. The library also contained a score or so of volumes of varied character, but all dealing with philosophical or speculative subjects, phrenology and physiognomy being well represented.

By the time Wilmot had completed his inspection he felt something approaching awesome respect for the uncouth Scotsman, whose external appearance suggested anything but the bookworm or student. But he was not surprised at this insight into the character of the man. During his sojourn in Johannesburg he had met too many millionaires who looked like loafers, and loafers who suggested millionaires, to allow a man's appearance and manner to influence him. He had never forgotten that the illiterate bricklayer who shared his bedroom at the Imperial International Canteen, and had but one change of raiment, had a banking account running

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into four figures, and was the principal shareholder in a prosperous brick and tile business; nor that the billiard-marker at the Red Crown was a Bachelor of Arts of Cambridge, and the lady who supplied milk to the hotel the wife of a broken-down Scottish baronet of ancient lineage. He was therefore quite prepared to find a mechanical genius with a European reputation in the old man who looked like a workshop labourer.

It was four o'clock when Wilmot had his interview with Adam; it was past sunset when the old man rejoined him and called a Kafir to light the oil-stove and prepare tea. He spent some minutes exploring a cupboard, grumbling at the scarcity of fare it provided, and making inhospitable comments on the nuisance of having to provide for unexpected visitors. A sensitive man would have been justified in abruptly leaving, and a few months before Wilmot might have thus marked his opinion of his host, but he now knew Rand ways.

"Bring out your best to-night. I'll pay for a fresh stock to-morrow," he said.

"I think that would be a reasonable basis of procedure if you purpose making a stay," Adam answered, and on the strength of the assurance brought out several luxuries that he had previously overlooked.

"Of course I'm going to stay," said Wilmot. "Think I'm making an afternoon call?"

"Well, you'll be the furrst factotum who stayed here longer than a fortnight—if you do."

Adam spoke with meaning emphasis.

"I don't suppose Sam Barton would agree to pay



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me twenty-five pounds a-month if there was nothing for me to do."

"Man, but it's evident you don't know Cyanide Sam. I've had as many as six fellows here at ~~one~~ time, all sent by Sam to do the same worruk at thirty pounds a-month." Adam chuckled as he said this.

"What did they do?"

"They quarrelled among themselves for a week, then drifted back to Johannesburg one at a time, after trying to borrow their train fare off me. Sam refused to pay them, and when they got impairtenent he threatened to prosecute them for desairtion."

"But I've got a proper agreement."

"Yes, which you might sue Sam on in the Landdrost's court; but as the Landdrost likely owes Sam money, or is in with him in some speculation, a fine chance you'd have of getting a vairdict, wouldn't you? You tak' the advice of a man who knows, and get away."

Wilmot felt very uncomfortable. The old man seemed perfectly serious and desirous of helping him. Why should he warn him to go if there was no reason for it? In a few moments he had made up his mind.

"I'll be hanged if I go!" said he resolutely. "I'm going to see this thing through. Dick Hartley would not have let me come if things were as you represent."

Adam showed surprise and interest at the mention of Hartley's name.

"Are you a friend of his?" he asked.

"Yes, we are in a thing together. We are great friends, business and otherwise."

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"That alters the case considerably. If Dick Hartley arranged this business for you, you're all reet. If there's one man who knows how to handle Cyanide Sam it's Dick."

From that moment Adam abandoned his hostile and minatory attitude. During the course of the long interchange of experiences that filled the evening he tacitly confessed that he had tried to scare Wilmot from the property, as he had his predecessors. "But," said he apologetically, "you are an improvement on them. They were all unintellectual clods—loafers on the look-out for a soft job with good pay. Man, one of the brutes had never read a line of Burrs. I notice that you have been looking at my books. I gather that you have a degree of literary perception, and I notice also that your orrgan of obsairvation is moderately well developed, but your orrgan of self-esteem induces you to be assertive, and opine you know more than you do, which is accentuated by your weak development o' the orrgan o' conscientiousness,—a vara great fault in any man, for it induces the vanity that shuts out real knowledge."

"You talk like a professional phrenologist," said Wilmot, much amused, and a little bit annoyed, as most men are, at uninvited criticism of their weak points.

"Phrenology and its cognate sciences have been my study for years. I am exceedingly well-informed on them. In fact, there is not a man in South Africa, and vara few in Europe, who know more about it than I. Let me diagnose you mechanically."



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Adam went to a shelf and took down a leathern hat-case, from which he extracted a fearsome-looking thing something like a cylindrical bird-cage without a bottom, constructed of steel laths and abounding with screws.

"This is a valuable and ingenious instrument of my own invention. I call it a craniometer, derived, as you may know, from 'cranium,' head, and 'meter,' a measure. I place it on the head o' the subject, and by adjusting these screws, which I turned myself, I press these steel bands round the skull so that I get an accurate and pairfect representation o' the extairnal configuration o' the occiput. Haud your skull doon."

Wilmot allowed him to apply the machine. When his head had been tightly compressed by the numerous steel bands that ran like the meridians of latitude and longitude up and down the interior of the craniometer, Adam released it by unfastening a catch that hinged the thing into two parts, and closing it again, placed it on the table and proceeded to study the mould of the skull that had been produced, Wilmot looking on, as he smoked, with amused interest.

The phrenological reading that followed was not calculated to enlarge the victim's bump of self-esteem. It was brutally frank and analytical. Wilmot, according to Adam's diagnosis, was a creature devoid of industry, conscientiousness, and a large proportion of the moral attributes that go to make an exemplary character. The set-off on the debit side was good power of observation, and a marked development of the organs of locality, language, and causality.

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"You would, but for your want of application, mak' a passable engineer, and could find your way about a country like this without a map, and that you would have the ability but not the application to construct."

This was the jam with the nauseous powder.

"And what about yourself?" asked Wilmot, still piqued by the brutal exposure of his supposed deficiencies.

"My own head," said Adam, still in the manner of a platform demonstrator, "is vara remarkable, and its examination has afforded pleasure and astonishment to many eminent students o' the science. I have conscientiousness vara large, constructiveness abnormmal, as you can see by this ingenious machine. Causality, which is the reflective faculty that engages men in the causes and origins of things, and which guides to the employment of processes of induction, and is the highest and loftiest of the intellectual powers,—I have developed in the highest degree. Firmness and benevolence are also far above the average."

"What about self-esteem?"

"My orrgan of self-esteem is present, but it is kept in check by the vara fine development o' the orrgans of caution and secretiveness, and particularly by the orrgan of comparison, which latter gives me the sense of proportion. Therefore, self-esteem, which in an ordinary head would lead to asserrtive conceit, in my case produces only proper self-respect."

"I'm very fortunate in having the society of a man so well supplied with the qualities I lack," Wilmot remarked.



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"That you are, and if your orrgans of veneration and imitation were better developed, you could not fail to benefit by my company and example. Although your brain is woefully small, your orrgan of eventuality is moderately good, which means that you have the proper inquisitiveness which, if rightly prompted and directed, leads to the acquisition of useful knowledge. Most women possess it, but they lack the sense of proportion, and so dissipate a great gift in the con-seederation of unimportant details."

Wilmot proceeded to exercise this faculty of inquisitiveness by seeking to know the real reason for Adam's objection to a colleague on the property; but the faculty was evidently not properly prompted and directed, for Adam fenced adroitly by diverting Wilmot with a narration of the methods employed to get rid of the objectionable assistants.

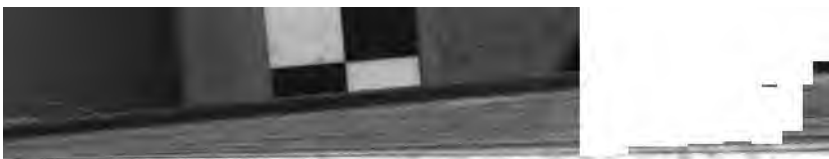
They were such as justified Adam's claim to ingenuity. One undesirable was sent to spend three consecutive days down the shaft watching for the outburst of an imaginary spring that was to flood the mine. He deserted on the fourth day. Another, with a childish horror of explosives, was put to emptying, loading, and testing dynamite cartridges in dark and dismal underground recesses. A third, a person with no aptitude for figures, was kept weaving a Penelope web of mine accounts, real and fictitious, which Adam regularly unwove at night by proving them inaccurate, starting the distracted victim spinning afresh next day till he also deserted.

The fourth seemed to have got fairly even with his

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tormentor—in fact, he scored heavily. He had been set to watch for the threatening spring, his tortures being accentuated by Adam sternly forbidding a light or smoking, for fear of the fire-damp that had as much existence as the water. On the morning of the fourth day he came hurriedly up the shaft, announcing a formidable outburst, and refusing to return until it had been verified by Adam. As soon as the old man had reached the bottom, the assistant sent the Kafir engine-driver off, telling him he need not return till night, accelerating the native's departure by a present of a shilling to buy liquor. Then the man packed his bag, helped himself to some of Adam's secret luxuries, and departed for Johannesburg.

Adam spent the rest of the day down the shaft, where he exhausted a copious vocabulary in a futile effort to attract the attention of the absent engine-driver. When the Kafir returned, very drunk, well after dark, and hauled up the cage, the old man expended the remaining atom of his vitality in qualifying the Kafir for prompt admission to hospital. When he had recovered, the native laid a charge of assault against Adam, who was fined a pound, and countered by getting the Kafir a dozen lashes for deserting his post. As soon as his back was healed the native, acting upon the superior knowledge of the mining regulations possessed by sympathising fellow-countrymen, laid information against Adam for contravention by employing a native engine-driver, and had the satisfaction of seeing the old man fined the penalty of twenty pounds, of which the in-



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former took half. What was worse, the directors sent a white engine-driver to the mine, but "I soon got rid of him," said Adam.

Wilmot began to feel keenly curious to divine the real reason of the old man's objection to having white men on the property. The suggestion that they were not meet companions for one of his eclectic tastes was not quite satisfactory. He persevered in his pursuit of the mystery, and in the course of a few days was satisfied that the true and only explanation was to be found behind the carefully guarded door of the workshop, where Adam spent quite two-thirds of the working hours. Several times Wilmot attempted to gain admission, but Adam was emphatic in his refusal. It was his exclusive domain, he said, and hinted that he was engaged in perfecting an important mechanical discovery that if successful would, like all new inventions, revolutionise the department for which it was intended. If it proved a success, the world would know all about it in good time; if a failure, the less said about it the better. This was all the result of Wilmot's inquiries, and though he did not believe it, he pretended he did, and openly showed no further curiosity.

In spite of Adam's original assurance that he had no need of an assistant, he found plenty to keep Wilmot occupied; and as these duties had heretofore been performed by himself, he had now more time for the workshop, and there he spent the hours from sunrise to sunset, frequently being absent from meals.

On the tenth day provisions ran out. Adam, on

seeing that his companion was prepared to pay his full share, suggested that he should go to a store near Roodepoort, kept by the inevitable Russian Jew, and arrange for revictualling. Wilmot complied. When, a few hours later, the stores were delivered at the mine and he checked them, he found several luxuries not mentioned in his list, including half a dozen bottles of a respectable and drinkable brand of whisky. He reported the matter to Adam.

"It's all reet," said the old man. "That's a bonsella."

"What's a bonsella?"

"A present given to encourage a good customer."

Wilmot evidently looked incredulous, for Adam proceeded to explanation.

"You see, we shall be having a crowd of natives here presently, when the work gets farther advanced, and Isaac has an eye to future business."

"By supplying the boys with illicit liquor, I suppose?"

"Weel, some people would give it that name," answered Adam carelessly.

Wilmot was indignant.

"And your bump of conscientiousness, which is so very large, allows you to wink at his poisoning the poor devils and making them unfit for work?"

"Man, but you tak' a narrow view of a wide subject," Adam answered. "If you think you can put down the illicit liquor business, you are greener than you look. The Directors don't object, because they know it's useless, and the Kafirs won't stay in a com-



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pound where they can't get their tots, so why should you trouble your head about what you can neither mend nor break?"

A few days later Wilmot received another shock to his belief in the conscientiousness of the phrenological mentor. The European who had the contract for transporting material from the railway arrived with a load, which, in the ordinary course, should have been discharged under Wilmot's superintendence. Adam exhibited conspicuous anxiety to get the man to himself, and effected it awkwardly, by sending his assistant to look for an old invoice in the office, while he led the contractor to an unoccupied building at the farther corner of the property.

Later in the day, when a shortage in the goods delivered was revealed, Adam volunteered a halting assurance that it was "a' reet," that he knew all about it, and would have it rectified in due course. Wilmot's inductive powers enabled him to detect the existence of an understanding between the Scotsman and the contractor, but he wisely refrained from hinting at his suspicions, for the conscientious Adam had impressed him as a man dangerous to quarrel with.

The frankness that had characterised Adam's conversation after the ice had been broken grew as the two knew one another better. The old man talked freely on every subject save the mystery of the workshop, and there was a delightfully clear utilitarianism in his philosophy. He admitted, in effect, that he was guilty of many little acts that ignorant people, unfamiliar with the full details, might consider robbed

a man of his right to being regarded as strictly moral ; but, he explained, " we are in a country of elementary conditions and principles, where matters cannot be conducted on the lines suitable and proper in a more civilised and polished community. Every man here is for himself ; and if dishonesty can be excused, that of the Rand may, for there is no hypocrisy intermixed with it. Every man knows the other is trying to get the better of him. The Directors, who put me here know that I shall do more for myself than for them, and they are content so long as I don't do too much. They know I get a commission on everything I order, and they also know that where I get a sovereign on a few tools, they get a thousand out of a piece of machinery. They also know that the compound manager, when we have one, will take a monthly present from the illicit liquor-sellers for shutting his eyes to the smuggling in of liquor ; but as they can't stop it, they are sensible enough to say nothing, beyond grumbling now and then at the meetings of the Chamber of Mines for the appearance of the thing. If you want a living example of the folly of the converse of my proposition, you have it in your friend Hartley. There you have a man who is honest as a Quaker, who wouldn't write a bogus report on a property for any fee offered, and who has knocked down the chairman of a big concern for suggesting it. What is the result ? Everybody is afraid of him, and he is obliged to take engagements that men of half his ability would be insulted by the offer of."

" But he seems to be greatly respected," said Wilmot.



"Yes; but you see those who respect him have nothing else to give him. I must say, though, that it gives him long credit, which is an awful misfortune. Man, he could get a distillery on tick."

Wilmot was hard to convince that honesty was at a discount in the mining world. "Surely if he is known as a truthful man his reports would have more value," he urged. "People will pay attention to what he says about a property."

"Exactly, but Hartley is this sort of man. If a property is worth fifty thousand he will say so. Anybody can do that. What is wanted is a man who will say it is worth a hundred and fifty, and that's where he fails."

"But the big houses don't do that sort of thing?"

"I won't go so far as that," answered Adam cautiously. "Big houses have no use for small men like Hartley. When they think of taking up a property, they find and know all about it for themselves. Their connection with it is all the guarantee the public want; they don't ask whether it's good or bad. It's the small syndicates and private speculators who employ men like Hartley to report. They have no capital of their own, and have to rely on persuading the public to supply it on the strength of inflated reports. But these small men are getting frozen out by the big people."

"But are not the big houses afraid that a man like Hartley might damage them by telling the truth?"

"Where and how could he say it? Don't they control the press of the country? And suppose he got a

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hearing. Who is Hartley, after all? They would put up a dozen experts with famous names, who would crush him out. Besides, they have a bigger weapon yet. Hartley is known to be a hard drinker. No, my friend; they neither fear nor favour such as he."

"Then if he is such a failure, what is to be the end of him?"

"What is the end of all pioneers in South Africa, or anywhere else I ever heard of? A pioneer is a man who gets in first and comes out last—if he comes out at all. That's Hartley's case."

"Then his only chance is to make a bit of money and quit, eh?"

"A mining man never quits. They can't. Prospecting is a disease, like Delagoa fever: once in the blood, it never goes out. His only chance is to get a mine managementship, to hold his tongue and shut his eyes; but he'll never do that. It's vanity as much as honesty. He has the organ of self-esteem too large."

"And a big bump of conscientiousness," added Wilmot.

"A bump! man, it's a kopje."

Before the month was completed Wilmot was thoroughly enjoying his life on the mine. The work was sufficient to occupy him without being onerous, and afforded him that insight into the office detail of mine management which he was earnestly desirous of acquiring. Adam, too, improved greatly on acquaintance. He had a vast fund of information on matters of interest to Wilmot, which compensated for his occasional boredom and irrepressibly assertive men-



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torship. The old man had read widely, if sporadically, and had measured, weighed, and labelled to his own satisfaction most of the problems of life and conduct over which less gifted savants are still pondering their verdict. His memory for apt quotation was surprising, all the more so in view of the fact that twenty years of his life had been spent on isolated mines or in camps far from books and men. It was the recollection of this that helped Wilmot to forgive him for off-loading on him the accumulation of knowledge and observation that should have been distributed over several large audiences; nor could he find it in his heart to stop him when Adam took the simplest inquiry as the signal to open the floodgates of his knowledge. During the evenings, when Adam was not working in the mysterious shop, they read, talked, and smoked over stimulants that alternated almost automatically between cups of washy coffee and glasses of the whisky provided by the storekeeper. Adam never failed to preface the production of the bottle with a brief apologetic homily on the advantage and even necessity of drinking, in moderation of course, in a climate like that of the Transvaal.

"I am not one of those," he would repeat, "who blame such as make fools of themselves, for I know they are the victims of too abnormal development of the orrgan of alimentariness, and of a deficiency in the orrgan of caution."

Wilmot noted with satisfaction that Adam never stepped beyond the line of moderation which he had drawn for himself at the sixth drink, with, on very



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special occasions, a seventh by way of absolute final.

At the end of the month Wilmot received from the Directorate his cheque for his salary without any accompanying comment, and in consequence felt his position assured. The pleasant notion was confirmed by the addition to the staff of a rough Cornishman, who took charge of the engine and hauling gear, while a third man arrived with fifty Kafirs and took possession of the native compound.

The Cornishman was promptly diagnosed by Adam as unfit for acceptance on terms of intellectual equality, so was given the opportunity of living and messing by himself in one of the detached bedrooms,—an arrangement that fitted satisfactorily with his economical habits. The compound manager was in the first stage of a courtship at Krugersdorp, whither he rode as soon as his work was finished, turning up next morning at various degrees of punctuality. The new conditions did not, therefore, in any way interfere with the even tenor of life at the mine for Adam and his companion.

Before the compound had been occupied a week, Wilmot had evidence of the prescience of Adam in the matter of the storekeeper and the motive underlying the liberal bonsellas. At least a dozen of the Kafirs were invariably too drunk for work every morning, and the first Sunday saw an orgie, resulting in a tribal fight and the incapacitating of half the native staff for work on Monday. On his return the compound manager reviewed his forces, and asserted his



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authority by tying up and flogging four of the ring-leaders, and fining twenty others half a crown apiece, which he carefully noted to deduct from their monthly pay.

Wilmot began to understand why compound managerships were bought and sold, and how a manager with a salary of £40 per mensem contrived to keep racehorses.



CHAPTER V.

AN ENLISTMENT OF BRAIN.

ON the first Sunday of the new month Hartley turned up at the Resurgam. He had been busy at his new job on the East Rand, and a casual glance satisfied Wilmot there was no need for the tight collar. He looked the picture of a healthy, wholesome, open-air man, and wore his town-going clothes as to the manner born. He greeted Adam with the easy indifference of an overnight acquaintance, although more than eighteen months had gone since they had been together in the close companionship of a prospecting trip.

"Glad you're here, want you badly," he said. "Come in and shut the door. No; don't bring out the liquor yet."

Adam had moved towards the cupboard.

"Got no time for piffle. This is serious business, understand."

The three men drew their chairs to the table, and after being assured that there was no chance of being overheard, Hartley plunged into the object of his call.

"You've got to help me, Adam. Got the biggest



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thing I've handled for years. Wilmot's in it, and we're going to let you stand in; but you've got to work for it. It's a dead secret. Not a word to a soul."

"Before I commit myself I must know something definite. I'm not the man to tak' on risks without careful conseederation," said Adam, drawing himself up and looking portentously serious.

"I've done all the considering; all you've got to do is to help."

There was an angry assertiveness about Hartley that forbade opposition. Adam, knowing him of old, accepted his mastership.

"Vara weel, go ahead; but mind, I resairve the right to object."

"And I resairve the right to punch your silly old head. Shut up and listen, will you?"

"You're impulsive as ever, Dick."

Dick took up a ledger from the table and poised it threateningly.

"Say another word and I'll down you."

"Never a worrud, Dick. Go on."

"I've got a goon—Maxim goon. Wilmot found it. A Reform Committee's goon. Going to run it into Magato's country."

Adam let out a long-drawn "Whoo!"

"But, Dick, that requires an awfu' lot o' conseederation. It's a great risk you're running."

"I tell you it's you who are running risk by making me feel wicked. Shut up, I say, before I clout ye."

Adam shut up.

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In jerky staccato sentences Hartley told the story of the find, checking the frequent and impatient interruptions and questions of the astonished Adam by raising the book at throwing angle.

"That goon has got to be brought here and fixed up, and you are the man to do it."

"But, Dick, I've not said I will have anything to do with such an infringement o' the common-sense laws o' the country. It's arrming savages you're doing."

"You've got nothing to do with that. You've got to fix up that goon."

"But suppose I refuse on strictly legal grounds; I'll say nothing o' the moral objections."

"Then I'll just go in and smash up that silly old invention of yours."

Adam started, and in a moment wore such an expression of terror that Wilmot was startled too.

Hartley went on. "Don't suppose he has shown you his machine, eh, Wilmot? Silly old crank! Got a bee in his bonnet over perpetual motion. Takes on jobs at deserted mines so that he can have the run of the workshops and be left alone."

The secret of the workshop was out.

"You've entirely misconceived the idea, Dick. It's not perpetual motion I'm after, but the consairvation of energy, which is another matter entirely, and the multiplicity and acceleration of motive power by agencies purely mechanical, but not yet understood."

Adam always adopted the formal language and manner of the lecturer when "explicating."



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"Not yet understood! I should think not. You don't understand it yourself. But I'm not going to discuss perpetual motion with a lunatic. I don't want your theories, I want your mechanical facts. The laws of mechanics according to the text-books are good enough for me. You've got to put that goon together and keep the thing as close as you do that thing of your own. If not, bang goes the machine—so!" and Hartley brought the ledger with a sounding thud upon the table.

"You're taking advantage of your superior brute strength," observed Adam in a tone that conveyed acceptance of the situation. "But it's altogether useless, for I've never seen a Maxim gun and don't know how to fix one."

"That's what you've got to find out. It's the first time you've ever admitted you didn't know everything," answered Hartley.

He proceeded to details, silencing all Adam's objections by refusing to believe they were seriously meant, till the old man meekly promised to do his best. He was careful to put in a saving clause.

"I'm not so certain about secrecy on this place," said he. "You see, the staff's been increased, and the Directors will be poking around presently. They've got to make a show of earning their fees and pretending they know something of their property."

"Did ever a Director or any one else get a glimpse of your infernal machine if you didn't wish it?" Hartley demanded.

"Nae, I've always been vara careful and discreet."

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"Then keep on being it, otherwise—— So-o-o!" and bang came the ledger.

"Show me where you keep that machine."

Adam started up in terror, for Hartley had moved towards the door.

"No, no, Dick, I dare not. Come back, Dick. I'll do what you want. I can do it,—I'm certain I can. It's a shooting business, but I'll do it, if you leave my machine alone. Don't go, Dick; don't go."

The old man almost howled, and capsized his chair in his haste to interpose between Hartley and the door.

"Sit thee doon, Adam. I'm not going. If you mean what you say, so do I. I know you have kept your secret quiet enough, and a place that's good enough for your machine is good enough for my goon. Sit down, man; you look white."

"I must have a wee drop to steady my nairves, Dick. You're worse than a thunderstorm, which always upsets me."

He poured out three portions of whisky into tea-cups with shaking hand. There was no question about the disturbing effect of Dick's impetuosity, neither was there as to the steadying corrective of the whisky. In a few minutes Adam was listening critically but quietly to the plan for unearthing the gun and bringing it to the mine.

"I've figured everything out," said Hartley. "In eleven weeks I shall have finished my job on the East Rand, and have about a hundred sovereigns, and I know where I can hire or borrow a waggon



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and span of oxen, and can see our way through. Are you playing the game, Wilmot?"

The young man affected not to understand the question, and for reply produced the cheque for his first month's wages, which he had not yet cashed.

"That's good, but don't go in to cash it yourself."

"Why not?"

Hartley significantly raised his hand to his mouth.

"There's no fear of that," Wilmot replied, a little angry.

"You're but a chicken yet, Wilmot," Hartley answered gravely. "You don't know what it means, going into a town with a cheque, after a month in a hole like this. 'Tisn't human nature not to celebrate. It's in the air, man. It's the curse of the country. Half of us would have been in the old country enjoying ourselves by this time, but for that month's end spree. Don't I know it! Look here; miss this chance, and you're done; I'm done, we're all done. Never go into town without a tight collar."

It was only the profound earnestness of Hartley that prevented Wilmot laughing. He hid his amusement in the cup of whisky. Dick was never so ardent an exhorter to abstinence as when he had a drink handy.

The three men sat long that evening, talking on and round the subject of the gun in all its bearings. Hartley had evidently well thought out his plans, for not a detail appeared to have been overlooked. Adam suggested a few amendments, to which Hartley assented, after long pauses for consideration, during

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which he drew illustrated diagrams on the bare table with the ends of burnt matches.

Gradually the discussion got round to Adam's mysterious machine. The old man had astutely side-tracked it several times, not wishing to reopen a subject that always produced a storm; but, as the liquor began to assert its effects, he grew bolder. A slight mistake made by Hartley on a point of mine mechanics was too tempting to let pass unimproved.

"And you're the man that dares to criticise the construction of my motor!" was the signal for the fray, which the other was in no humour to shirk.

Wilmot sat and smoked in quiet enjoyment of the struggle. The old man was by far the better debater, and his subtle Socratic method of asking innocent questions on abstruse points drew Hartley into a web of contradiction and tacit confessions of ignorance, from which he only partially extricated himself by renewing his threat to punch Adam's silly old head. The more Adam drank, the more mercilessly logical he became, while Dick, on the contrary, grew involved and assertive, leaving points open for attack of which his opponent was quick to take advantage.

After this twentieth threat of violence had provoked the philosophical retort that knocking the ledger to pieces would not disturb the cast-up of the figures it contained, Hartley summed up the position with a charge all along the line. "But, man," said he, banging the now damaged ledger on the table, "you have the experience and testimony of all the mechanics in the world against you."



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"So had Jamie Watt and George Stephenson. Didn't Dr Priestley, your great English *theoretical* scientist,"—Adam italicised the adjective,—“offer to eat the firrst steam-boat that crossed the Atlantic. Yet I never heard of his doing it.”

Hartley was relighting his pipe when this retort was fired, so Adam took advantage of the temporary disarmament of his adversary to follow up his point.

“There was never yet a scientific theory propounded that wasn't declared nonsense. What about cyanide on the Rand, eh? Answer that.”

This was a severe and telling thrust, for Hartley had been one of the old school of mining men who had opposed the introduction of the cyanide process of extracting gold, which had practically saved and established the industry.

“Will you dare to say that the Ultima Thule of human knowledge and ingenuity has been reached? Are you a dunder-headed Canute, who will say to the waves of mechanical progress, ‘So far shalt thou go and no farther’? How can you know what is in this brain of mine? How can you tell what new principle of mechanical motion I may have discovered?”

“But yours is not a new principle,” Hartley feebly objected.

“And what is my principle?” Adam demanded the answer magisterially.

“I don't know it.”

Adam rose, and with one hand on the table and the other pointing at his victim, pronounced sentence—



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"Out of your own mouth are you convicted. You confess that you know nothing. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. You have no *corpus* on which to hold an inquest. You are a dense, assertive, ignorant negationist, who denies the existence of a thing because he has not the brains to conceive it; you are destructive without the capacity to construct; you are——"

Adam never completed the sentence. The oft-poised ledger arrived without warning, and catching him full in the chest, laid inventor, chair, and table in a tangle on the floor.

The old man gathered himself into a sitting posture, replaced the chair, and putting his head through the back as in a picture-frame, remarked—

"Man, you've a magnificent muscle, but brute force cannot upset the eternal verities. Your brain is mud, mud, mud!"

Then he dodged, while Hartley skipped over the capsized table, and, sitting on the old man's chest, seized the bald head between his big hands.

"Say that again, and I'll bash your crazy brain," he roared, shaking him.

"It's a fig—fig—figure of speech," came jerkily and gurgling from his throat, as Hartley bumped his head on the floor.

"Only a figure o' speech, eh? well, that's all right. If I thought you meant it I'd wipe the floor with you. Get up and give me a drink."

Adam got up, readjusted the furniture, and calmly poured out what was left in the bottle.

"Man," said he, "but it's an awful waste of good



whisky," and he looked ruefully at the bottle, that had been all but emptied by its fall.

Wilmot, who had begun to be alarmed at the serious turn things had threatened, expressed his satisfaction at the cessation of hostilities by a humorous suggestion that difference of opinion was the result of variations in the shape of the head.

"Don't talk about shapes of heads," said Hartley. "It's the recollection of his head-machine that makes me feel wicked. Have you seen that damned bump-measuring machine of his? That thing lost me a fortune. The old fool had it with him when we were up in Magato's kraal; Magato took a fancy to me, agreed to give me a concession for mahogany and teak, when Adam clapped that machine on his head and frightened him half out of his wits. Gave us six hours to clear out. Missed the finest thing of my life. Can you wonder that I get wicked when Adam talks of his inventions?"

"It's the old story," said Adam sadly. "Inventors are the benefactors of the human race, but get their heads bumped by the ignorant and unappreciative."

"That bump-machine benefited me a lot, didn't it! Never mind, let's have another drink. Damn you for making me feel wicked!"

Adam resumed his seat at the table and drank. "Here's your health, Dick; I've no ill-will, and wouldn't mak' you angry if you weren't such a dense dolt when it comes to an abstract proposition. You have no imagination or logic, man. You're a gross

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materialist, and look only at results; and they're very poor in your case."

"I can't get your bump-machine out of my head, and if you mention it again I'll smash it."

The threat had its effect for a time, for, as Adam confided to Wilmot later, the organ of destructiveness was so abnormally developed in Hartley's head that there was always danger lurking therein. That was why he conciliated him.

Hartley, like most big men, was as easily soothed as a child, and in ten minutes the atmosphere was blissfully calm with tobacco-smoke and the odour of decent whisky. But Adam could not rest content with the moral victory he had secured in debate, particularly as his opponent was showing signs of sleepiness by alternately lying back in his chair with closed eyes, or leaning heavily over the table, apparently endeavouring to comprehend the charcoal diagrams.

"To avoid unnecessary friction," he began, "which is the objective point in applied mechanics, let us tak' it for granted that I am a fool and a crank."

Hartley nodded a drowsy assent, and Adam poured out his seventh and presumably final whisky from a new bottle.

"I will not irritate you by reminding you that fools in all ages have applied the same opprobrious epithets to every original mind that was beyond their limited power of conception, nor will I tell you that cranks have been the motive-force that has moved the worruld. You are too grossly destitute of the orrgan



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of causality to understand me, even if I were to inoculate you with the virus of common-sense with the aid of mechanical reasoning such as you in your brute strength attempted with that heavy book. Just for a lucid interval try to remember that you once learned the rudiments of the exact science of Geometry, and I'll explicate. Look here!" and he began to draw diagrams on the table with the ends of matches, while Hartley looked sleepily on, nodding qualified approval.

Adam talked rapidly, and illustrated as he talked, frequently amending his diagrams by rubbing them out with his palm and redrawing them until compelled by Hartley to restore them to their original form.

"None o' that. Stick to your original proposition," and he would rub out the alteration, and both attempt to reproduce the original.

About midnight Wilmot grew tired of trying to bottle up his laughter at the sight of the solemn faces of the disputants, smudged with the charcoal, and retired to bed just as the two abandoned the diagrams for practical demonstration of the laws of motion with a wheel, wrenched from a barrow, and weighted with books hung round its periphery. As he dozed off he was dimly conscious that the experiment had confuted Hartley, for he was threatening to clout somebody, who retorted with a brief but pointed observation on the folly of appealing to an intellect that was so obviously befuddled with whisky that it could not disairn the difference between a sine or chord and the segment of a wheelbarrow.

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Next morning Hartley was up and about, with the alertness of the healthy vigorous animal he was. At breakfast he gave his audience a clear *résumé* of the plan of campaign as settled overnight, with useful hints as to the conduct of any correspondence that might be necessary, arranging an ingenious code of phrases that, in the event of a letter falling into unauthorised hands, would render it unintelligible, and generally displayed a resourcefulness and mastery of the situation that impressed Wilmot much, and confirmed his already firm belief in the fitness of Hartley for leadership.

Adam, on his part, undertook to receive the gun into his secret workshop, on the distinct understanding that neither of the others was to enter the building without his consent, to which undertaking both solemnly pledged themselves.

One night, during the intervals of the moon, the gun was dug up without native assistance, and safely deposited by the side of the mysterious motor. In the course of the following day Wilmot was admitted to the workshop, after a long and solemn reminder of his pledge of secrecy in the matter of the motor, where he had his first full and unhurried gaze on the treasure that he regarded as the nucleus of his fortune.

Despite his self-depreciatory protests, Adam had proved an ingenious mechanic. Although he had never before seen such a piece of machinery, he had fixed it together in a couple of hours. But when it came to testing the working, the awful fact stood revealed that a vital part of the feeding apparatus was missing.



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The gun would do everything except receive the cartridges at the proper place in the breech, and therefore was, for all practical purposes, useless. Adam had thought out a remedy, or rather a principle on which to base a remedy, but he preferred to consult Hartley before acting upon it.

Dick came over in response to an urgent letter, and inspected the fault and Adam's suggested substitute for the missing action. This latter was certainly ingenious, and fed the breach; but its action was erratic, and lacked the smoothness and certainty of the real thing.

"It's no good taking an incomplete thing to 'Mpfeu,'" said Hartley. "He is no missionary fool savage, and is not to be swindled. I've promised a good goon for good diamonds, and I'll keep my word or drop the thing."

During the long and anxious consultation between the two mechanics, Wilmot suddenly received an inspiration. He remembered having met, in his early days in Johannesburg, a man who claimed to know much about modern artillery. He was only the casual acquaintance of an evening, but if he could be found he might be made useful. It was a very remote chance, but unless Adam could perfect his suggestion light must be sought elsewhere.

Meanwhile Wilmot was to make cautious inquiries as to the whereabouts of this engineer, and Adam was to carry out the scheme Hartley had devised for concealing and transporting the cartridges, the only heavy and troublesome part of the equipment. He was to construct a framework of timber that, to the casual

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observer, would appear merely the ordinary headgear of a mine-pump or drill used in boring for the reef. These timbers were to be hollow cases formed of inch planking instead of solid baulks, and inside them the cartridges and small working parts of the gun could be safely concealed. A ten-foot long steel rod, known as a jumper-drill, would be included with the gear, and when the whole was complete it would require some technical knowledge and certainly the close inspection of the average man to disprove the proposed description of the thing as a new kind of prospecting drill. The gun was encased in an unostentatious block, but the cartridge-lined headgear, consisting of twenty-foot lengths of timbering six inches by eight, was a formidable matter, for it bulked heavily. The transportation of the cartridges from their hiding-place was a tiresome and long-drawn task that extended over the nights of three weeks, as there was no cart on the mine, and the boxes had to be brought away two at a time in a wheelbarrow.

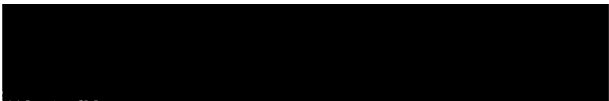
Adam grumbled horribly at this work, which seemed to damp the little enthusiasm that had been aroused by the struggle with the gun. He croaked the most gloomy forebodings, and at times quite killed the thrills of anticipation which had filled Wilmot with happiness. Adam's objections were equally divided between the moral and material aspect of the business. Wilmot had but a vague idea of the nature of the risk he was sharing in breaking a law that, perhaps, above all others, had the support and approval of the entire white population of South Africa. The



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arming of Kafirs has ever been in the eyes of Boers and Colonials the most dastardly of crimes, and there were few among the later arrivals in the country who would not regard it with horror and detestation when its significance was explained.

When pressed for reasons Adam confessed that his objections were based more on the personal risk than on the principle involved. Hartley had not expressed his views on the ethical side of the question; the danger had little weight with him, according to Adam, and that Wilmot could believe. When the matter occupied his thoughts Wilmot mollified his scruples by arguing that one machine-gun would not count for much in the hands of unskilled natives; and even if, after a few trials, the piece did not break down, the hundred thousand cartridges that was the stock of ammunition would not last long, especially if, as was more than probable, the chief indulged in much preliminary practice. However, a fortune was not a trifle to be set aside for the sake of a moral scruple and a contingency that might never occur. So Wilmot dismissed it and began his quest for the authority on modern artillery by writing to persons in Johannesburg likely to know where he was to be found and awaited developments.



CHAPTER VI.

IN BOERDOM.

A FEW days later Hartley arrived at the Resurgam, bringing a couple of saddle-horses, and announced his intention of taking Wilmot with him to the Boer's farm where the loan or hire of the necessary waggon and oxen was to be arranged. Two hours before noon the two men set out on their twenty-five-mile journey.

It was the young Englishman's first experience of the open veld. Like most Johannesburgers, the outside of the Gold Reef City was to him a closed book, known only by repute. Except for a fleeting view from a railway-carriage window, he had not yet known the horizon-bounded ocean of undulating grassy plain, over which the eye could range till vision melted in the blur of distance, with naught to break the monotony save the low-lying, far-away ridge of some nameless mountain-range, that was only a dark uncertain line that might be the mist rising from a distant river; or in the remote middle distance, a clump of tall blue-gums, marking a Boer's homestead,—a tiny islet in a sea of green,—and here and there a narrow reddish ribbon, distinguishing a road or Kafir track from the



plain it traversed. For the first time he learned what is meant by the silence of the veld, that soundless continuity wherein the gentle swish of the horses' feet in the long grass is as the lap of wild sea wave by contrast;—a smooth solitude where the breeze has naught to break against to startle it into sound; where no bird sings, and no cry of man or beast suggests companionship. And above, "the inverted bowl we call the sky," its steely blue unflecked by aught save the sentinel vulture poised motionless a thousand feet in air, while the scorching sun burns and parches the skin through an atmosphere so glassily transparent that the outlines of the blue Magaliesberg, fifty miles in the rear, are pencilled sharply against the background of infinity.

The small, ungroomed veld horses pressed untiringly on at that steady ground-covering swing between a canter and a trot that the Boers call tripping, and which has been the veld-rider's only pace since first he crossed a saddle. An hour out they came upon a waggon, outspanned for the mid-day rest. A long-limbed Boer lay in the shadow beneath it, smoking placidly, while the two Kafirs, clad in the dirty remnants of a white man's clothing that an inartistic conventionality insists should conceal and vulgarise their shapely forms when in town, were boiling coffee at a fire of dry cow-dung. Hartley was in doubt which route to take to avoid a marsh he knew to lurk hereabouts, and sought advice from the lounging Boer. He lazily lifted the flap of his wide smasher hat, gazed steadily and searchingly at the questioner, then, read-

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justing pipe and hat, and rolling into a more comfortable position, grunted in the Taal—

“Turn to left by the first thorn-tree.”

When they reached the thorn-bush indicated Hartley went straight on. Wilmot reminded him that the Boer had mentioned the first bush. “Of course he did,—that’s why I’m going on to the second. Don’t you know that a Boer’s directions must always be taken in reverse? It is part of their religion to put a Rooinek off the road whenever possible.”

Hartley’s reading of the advice proved correct. They found the track over the marshy ground by the second thorn-bush. An hour’s riding brought a homestead into sight, distant ten or twelve miles. It was their goal, Hartley said, and by way of preparation, gave his companion a sketch of the family they were about to visit, with a few very necessary hints on that trial for strangers, the etiquette of a Boer household, on the observance of which so much depends if friendly relations are to be maintained.

Piet Jacobus Theunissen de Villiers was a well-to-do Boer, who had profited by the neighbourhood of the goldfields. The son of one of the oldest and poorest of the voor-trekkers of 1834, he had been born on the farm he had never spent six consecutive days away from, and had raised a family of ten before taking a second wife, a widow with six children of her own. The family now consisted of sixteen, ranging from a daughter of twenty-five to a toddler of twelve months.

“If Piet should begin to talk politics,” said Hartley, “don’t omit to say you are no Rhodes man. This



Raid business has made him very bitter, and, like old Kruger, his first question to a Rooinek is, 'Are you a Rhodes man?'

Wilmot further learned that Clarie, the oldest daughter, and Hendrika, the elder daughter of the second wife, were both educated, but the rest only just emerging from savagedom. He continued,—“You'll see the funniest mixture of civilisation and barbarism; piano and saddle-rack in the sitting-room, serviettes and silver forks for the two girls, fingers for the rest. You can hear the youngsters wolfing their skoff half a mile away, though Clarie was licking them into decency when I was last here. But never be surprised at anything you see in a Boer's house. They are rough, but they're honest and hospitable,—the sort of people who would give you a square meal, then sjambok you off the place.”

Although the farm covered six thousand acres, and was one of the most prosperous in the district, running nearly a thousand head of cattle, it was unfenced, except the few hundred square yards that formed the homestead. Piet was old-fashioned in this matter. Rivers and mountain-ridges were his boundaries, and as his Kafirs knew the beacons, he held them responsible if the cattle strayed, and was quite strong and wealthy enough to fight any neighbours who objected, which they could hardly do logically, being themselves unfenced; and as nobody raised crops of any kind, there was nothing to damage.

As they rode up to a big tree branch drawn between the two posts that did duty for a gate, Wilmot noticed

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a stone weighing perhaps a hundred pounds lying in the centre of the roadway, and so close to the gate that, judging by the numerous tracks on each side of it, vehicles had to make a sharp and risky deviation to avoid it. He directed Hartley's attention to it, inquiring why it was not removed.

"That stone fell there when they were riding building material for the cattle-kraal six years ago. There have been a dozen serious accidents over it to my knowledge," said Hartley.

"Then why on earth isn't it removed?"

"Because Piet de Villiers is a Boer, and because it's easier to fall over or go round it than drag it away."

As they approached the farmhouse, Wilmot was able to exercise the faculty of observation for which Adam gave him credit.

Piet's farm was one of the four hundred Rietspruits (spring with the reeds) that puzzle the map-makers of South Africa. The house had been erected in the late 'Forties, with unburned brick and mud, and thatched with long grass. As the family increased, extra rooms had been added to the original two, wherever they would fit, and in styles varying from the pristine mud to corrugated sheet-iron, and substantial masonry,—the work of one of the nomadic English artisans, who are as famous throughout sections of the country as the pedlar and wandering minstrels of the rural districts of Great Britain. It was, of course, a low one-storeyed building, as all Transvaal farms are, with windows not more than two feet square, and doors often a tax on



the long-limbed young Boers of this generation. Scattered around the house with no apparent plan or arrangement, were Kafir-built round grass-huts, stone forage-houses, or pig-sties, a green-brick stable, used for every purpose but the shelter of horses; and on the bare space a few yards from the kitchen-door, a number of pots were boiling over a wood fire, while the bread was baking in the primitive but effective oven, scooped out of a huge ant-hill. Fifty yards from the house a few drooping posts and tangled wire failed to keep the pigs from invading what had been a small flower-garden. It contained the only tree that had been planted on the property during the fifty odd years of its uninterrupted occupancy—a straggling peach-tree.

This was the external aspect of the home of a man who owned a second valuable six-thousand-acre farm in the low veld, whither the cattle were driven to escape the bitter winter of the high ground; ten thousand pounds worth of cattle, and at least five thousand sovereigns concealed somewhere in the house, the proceeds of Piet's share in a successful gold-claim deal. It is true Piet was sufficiently progressive to keep a hundred pounds in the Netherlands Bank at Krugersdorp, and ostentatiously flourished the cheque-book he could not fill up in his own handwriting when paying small accounts. That cheque-book helped out his story that all his money was in the keeping of the bank, and doubtless freed him from much of the anxiety that was the lot of less astute farmers who had to devise a new hiding-place for their capital every

time some unauthorised person got a clue to its whereabouts.

The visitors rode up to the stoep or raised verandah that surrounded three sides of the house, and as they approached, Wilmot noticed many small unkempt heads dodging behind corners of doors, and eyes peeping from beneath the bottoms of the blinds, but not a whole figure came in sight. As the men dismounted, a shrill juvenile voice from some look-out uttered the Boer danger-signal—

“Pa, two Rooineks have come!”

“On foot or on horse?” came the stereotyped inquiry in a drowsy bass voice, the answer to which settles the question of “at home” or “not at home” to visitors.

It was evidently satisfactory, for a big, burly, sleepy Boer shuffled round from the back of the house. He recognised and shook hands with Hartley, greeting him with a guttural “Goie dag,” repeated the salutation to Wilmot with drowsy indifference, and called to a Kafir youth, clad in nothing but the *moucha*, or loin-cloth, to take the horses.

“Come in,” he ordered curtly, and led the way to the sitting-room, that opened on to the stoep.

Piet dropped his big body into his arm-chair at the head of the long dining-table, took his pipe and silently loaded and lighted it. The visitors did the same, and the silence remained unbroken during twenty puffs. It is not Boer etiquette for a visitor to open a conversation.

When Piet had partially recovered from the exertion

of the reception, he opened with the customary catechism.

Where had they come from? where going? who was Wilmot?

Hartley spoke the Taal and supplied the answers, while Wilmot's feminine instinct for observation gratified itself over the details of the first Boer home he had seen.

The regulation questions having been put and answered, the preliminary essentials of Boer conventions were conformed to, and coffee was called for. With it came a heavy Boer woman of about forty-five, whom Piet introduced to Wilmot as "my vrouw." Hartley already knew her. She held out a big flabby palm, which, in accordance with prior instructions, Wilmot just stroked with his own, then placed herself in a chair on the opposite side of the room, folded her fat hands, and eyed the two men from their boots to their hair.

"You are now not so much of a drunkard any longer?" she asked in English of Hartley.

There was something quite friendly in the tone of the inquiry. But for that Wilmot might have forgotten his friend's warning against showing surprise. "No, tante; am too busy making money to have time to drink," Hartley answered cheerily, as if replying to the prettiest compliment.

"You look quite clean, and have nice clothes," she went on.

What more she may have said was interrupted by suppressed feminine titterings and whisperings at the

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kitchen-door, and a gawky girl of nine or ten was projected into the sitting-room, apparently by a thump in the back from an unseen hand. She came awkwardly up to the visitors and shook hands in silence. Wilmot's quick eye detected the propelling force in the form of a big girl who stood partly inside the room, seized each child as she came forward to be introduced, passed a damp and dirty dish-cloth over its face, and assisted it into the presence-chamber by a vigorous push.

Wilmot lost count when seven or eight youngsters in varying stages of playtime untidiness had been filtered through, and stolidly resigned himself to waiting his turn to have his palm stroked. Presently the output lagged, and the girls grew bigger, more shy and gawky, but a little less untidy. When ten girls and four boys had gone through the ceremony, the youngsters rushed back to the kitchen, while the half-dozen bigger girls sidled into the chairs arranged in a rigid row against the walls, folded their hands in their laps, and joined Mrs de Villiers in gazing at the visitors, Wilmot coming in for the lion's share of attention.

"Where's Clarie?" asked Piet, when the presentations had finished. For answer there came into the room a young woman, whose refined dress and grace of manner and speech stood out in wondrous contrast to the environment of slatternly coarseness around the walls. She was the elder daughter of whom Hartley had spoken, and Wilmot felt an agreeable thrill as he looked on and shook hands with a



daughter of the veld, whose healthy vigorous womanhood had been toned and cultured by the refining touch of early contact with civilisation. But for a suggestion of that languid heaviness that is the ineradicable mark of the veld-bred girl, Clarie would not merely have passed muster in any assembly of middle-class English girls, but would have attracted attention. The dark-eyed comeliness of her Huguenot ancestors had not been marred by its transition through generations of uncouth Boers; and the vitality that tradition associates with Southern blood had given place to a soft caressing gentleness of voice and manner one likes to associate with ladyhood.

The death of her mother had made Clarie the natural head of the family for the five years of her father's widowship, and her sense of duty to her brothers and sisters had impelled her to refuse the several offers of marriage that had come to her; but she had no heart-travail in rejecting them, for her five years, spent amid the refining influences of a good school, had put a gulf between her and the rugged men who now formed her limited circle of acquaintances. As often happens in Boer homes, where second marriages are more common than in most civilised communities, there was an implacable feud between the children of the first and second mother, which was kept alive by the irascible and jealous temperament of Mrs de Villiers,—late Mrs van Rooyen,—partly by way of revenge for the hostility manifested towards the marriage by Clarie and the elder children, partly as the result of a naturally shrewish disposition. But

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even had selfishness and self-defence impelled Clarie to abandon her mothership, she could not, for a Boer maiden knows no home but that of her parents or husband, and the notion of an independent life is utterly foreign to her, for it implies service to others.

Hers was no uncommon lot. On many a lonely South African farm a woman eats out her heart in vague longings for something higher and better than the dreary round of soulless life amid unsympathetic surroundings that revolt all that is finest in her nature and make her an alien among her own kindred by reason of the repugnance the life inspires. For five weary years she had struggled, in the face of the sneering and active opposition of her step-mother, to inoculate the boorish juniors with some degree of that social elevation of which she had had a glimpse during the five happy years of her stay at the Bloemfontein school. Her own nature was of that type which is keenly receptive to religious impressions, and the seeds of a clean moral sentiment implanted by the devoted headmistress had, to an extent, been nourished, though with less warmth, by the influence of the Rev. Petrus Stegmann, a young Predikant of the Dutch Reformed Church, whose views of life and its duties were slightly more modern and catholic than the austere theology of his order tolerated. He was therefore, like Clarie, out of tune with his own people, and the intercourse the two enjoyed, on the too rare occasions of his visits to the district, helped both to feel a sympathy and mutual



understanding that were appreciated the more intensely because of their rarity.

This communion of wellnigh kindred spirits had its alloy in the long prayers and drowsy readings of inapposite passages of Old Testament history by which the young Predikant salved his conscience for the unorthodoxy of the general converse. The poetic spirituality and sentiment of Christianity have little part in the religion of the rival churches of Afrikanderdom. The priest is but an authorised reader of the law, whose efficiency and worthiness is gauged by the emphasis with which he drives home by precept and precedent the necessity for the punitive provisions of the Mosaic dispensation and the jeremiads of the prophets. Clarie tolerated the prayers and readings as the price she had to pay for the intellectual treat the conversation of the young Predikant afforded; but she was always secretly glad when they were over, for her inability to feel any heart-touching or moral stimulant from the offices sometimes made her conscious of a degree of insincerity, if not of actual hypocrisy, in consenting to endure them: though often she would lie awake after the Predikant's visit, making wild guesses at the particular original evil in her blameless youth that was being expiated by a life of dull unappreciated self-surrender and loneliness. The prayers and readings gave her no clue.

"I see no advantage in trying to make others better," she remarked to Hartley, when, half an hour afterwards, they were together, away from the tur-

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moil of the house. "I sometimes think that what Mrs de Villiers says is true, and that I am doing wrong in teaching my sisters, for I fear that some day they will blame me for giving them hopes and desires they can never gratify. It is, after all, educating a Kafir. You make him discontented with his own people, and a solitary creature."

"Then why do you keep it up?" Hartley asked, in his matter-of-fact way of looking at things.

"Because I think it my duty, and promised Miss Ross, the schoolmistress at Bloemfontein, I would try to be an example of unselfishness in my home. And I do want little Lisbeth and Paul—all of them—to be better than their step-sisters and brothers, and the men and women on the farms, who are only different from Kafirs in being whiter. Yet I sometimes wish that I had never been educated. It makes me a foreigner with my own people. I have to spend my life among them, and I think I should be happier if I could see and think as they do, enjoy what they enjoy, and not be pained and upset every hour by something that horrifies me and makes me feel superior, and my own flesh and blood so very far below me. It is not a right feeling to have, Dick, but I can't help it."

"Don't get melancholy; you will see over the kraal-wall again," was all that Hartley could think of by way of consolation, Clarie had spoken so very seriously. She shook her head.

"I am getting old, and I am now too necessary to the children. No; I shall never see the flowers



on the other side of the mountain. I have thought much over this, Dick. I used to cry a great deal when I first came back from school, and when *she* came; but now I cheer myself up by thinking of little Lisbeth. She will be a good woman, Dick. She is such a sweet child, and loves me;—she's the only one, though."

Hartley was silent. He, too, had often thought hard. Men who spend long lonely months with nature ponder much, and since the day some five years ago when he made the acquaintance of the bright young woman, just returned to take up her dull life at the farm, the nearest habitation to his prospecting camp, he had often thought of her, wearing out her gentle nature in that sordid uncongenial home. They had frequently met and talked, but always without hint of love or even friendship. They took the latter for granted. The talk and company of this great, bluff, manly fellow, as hungry for sympathy as herself, formed an oasis in her arid life. She admired the manly in him, the honesty and fearlessness of which he never boasted, and regarded indulgently the weaknesses he did not deny,—his occasional outbursts of foolish intemperance, his reckless abandonment of opportunity for self-advancement. If at any time there had been on her side a tenderer feeling, it was promptly repressed by the ever-present knowledge that he was an Englishman, one of an alien race, with whom she could have no closer part or lot without outrage on the traditions on which she had been reared by a father fiercely Afrikaner

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in sentiment. Perhaps if she could have argued the matter out, her logical sense would have perceived the absurdity of imagining a barrier of racial inequality, but she never did. The unthought, unspoken sentiment was latent, as in the innermost hearts of all Boer maidens,—“He is not one of us,—superior maybe, but no Afrikaner.” Thus their pleasant friendship had continued, unchecked by any thought that it could be more on her part; therefore she saw nothing unmaidenly in her unreserved freedom with a stranger who could for a time take her out of her grey environment. She often sighed because her own men-folk were not more like this wholesome manly Englishman, who knew and had seen so much, and never made her feel uncomfortable by jokes or cumbersome compliments, and gross talk of things better left to elders. Then, despite his bigness and his gruff manner with men, he was always so gentle with her, so deferential, almost boyishly timid at times. Her men seemed despicable when he was about, and even they tacitly confessed his superiority by giving way to him in everything.

Hartley had withdrawn Clarie from the sitting-room to the comparative privacy of the stoep at the first opportunity, by sundry nods and jerks of his head towards the door, then produced from his saddle-bags a bundle of volumes and magazines.

“Haven’t forgotten you,” he said apologetically. “They’re all good.”

Clarie could not repress a smile as she glanced through a heterogeneous collection of literature that



ranged from George Eliot to the sporting novel and shilling shocker. She was genuinely grateful, however, for it was many a weary month since her little library had been augmented. She had re-read often the dozen or so volumes that had been Hartley's gift and legacy when he left the prospecting camp, and had cherished them as much for the sake of the giver as for the companionship they provided.

"Don't let that cat Mrs de Villiers get hold of them," Hartley advised.

"But she never reads."

"No, but she devours. I know she tore up some that I gave you."

Clarie made no answer. The recollection of the rancorous pettiness of her step-mother was a matter of ever-present grief, and cost her many a struggle with her better self to resist open resentment.

Hartley guessed the reason for her silence.

"Why don't you leave her?" he asked in his abrupt manner. "How much do you get out of your share of the farm?"

It was the first time he had put the question that other young men with less delicacy required an answer to on very brief acquaintance. It is quite a permissible inquiry in Boerdom.

"Next to nothing. I only ask for enough to buy clothes. It causes unpleasantness with her if I ask father for money."

"You must get away from this. Would you if you could?" He looked inquiringly at her. Clarie kept her eyes on the distant Gatsrand.

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"I could not leave little Lisbeth to her. She hates the child, and there are the others who need me. No; I am of some use here. I should be nothing away."

"But you say you have doubts as to the wisdom of educating the little pigs."

Clarie answered promptly—

"It is because I do not wish them to be pigs that I want to remain."

"And miss helping those who would be the better for your help, and thank you for it."

She did not answer, lest she might ask what he meant.

"Then what is to be the end of it?" he went on with unconsciously brutal frankness. "You are not getting younger, and you are not half as bright as you used to be. Isn't it worth making an effort to get free? If you do not, you will become one of those Boer women you don't want your sisters to be like."

"Do you really think so?" Clarie asked.

Hartley hastened to qualify his rude speech.

"You could never be a coarse woman, Clarie; you would always be a gentlewoman and a lady: but I mean you cannot go on living with Kafirs without picking up their ways."

Clarie felt what he meant, but wished he had not expressed it quite that way.

"You are wasting your life by burying yourself here."

Again she urged her love for her younger sisters, and their urgent need of some one to stand between



them and their openly hostile step-mother. She dared not add what was also in her thoughts, forced by the remorseless directness of Hartley's criticism, that she knew of no other sphere; neither did Hartley suggest anything beyond the heroic burning of her boats before she had landed on firm ground.

"I should not mind my own life here so much if I could see people oftener who understand me," she went on, as if to prevent Hartley saying what she half feared he might. "And I think, as the children grow older, they will understand me better. I can't expect them to be grateful now, for after all I am as their governess, always checking them, and setting my face against things that they have been used to doing all their little lives, and which their other sisters and brothers do without any interference. It is only natural. I hated the teachers when first I went to school, except the headmistress, Miss Ross, and she was so sweet that I soon began to believe that she was truly my friend, and only wanted to benefit me. I want my sisters to feel for me what I have ever since felt towards her. I would put up with anything to be loved as Miss Ross was."

Clarie was not the only young Afrikander woman who had learned to see the tenderly human side of life from that angelic headmistress who has left an ineradicable impress of her own pure nature upon hundreds of girls who had the privilege of her care.

Hartley was half conquered by Clarie's objections,—they were urged with such obvious sincerity; besides, had he not the evidence of five years of her

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heroic constancy to her ideal? He made one more effort, but rather feebly—

"You will always have to fight your step-mother."

"I don't attempt to fight her. She is not the worst thing I have to put up with. There is her cousin, Johannes Smeer. She has made up her mind that I shall marry him, to keep my share of the farm in her family; and, O Dick! he is a horrid animal!"

Hartley was startled. "Smeer? That brute? Why, he's little better than an imbecile! He's filthy, and fifty or more. God, Clarie, you can't mean it!"

She shook her head. "It's too true, Dick. He all but lives here now, and has told everybody he is going to marry me."

Hartley grasped her arm fiercely. "He shall never marry you. I'll break his neck first!"

His vehemence frightened her, for she had seen him in his bursts of anger, and in them he was terrible.

"I'm going up country. When I come back, I'll tell you why you shan't marry him," he said.

That speech was to haunt her for many a day.

Then, as he generally did after an outburst of feeling, Hartley lit his pipe, bungling and puffing over it like a boy at his first essay.

Clarie changed the subject by observing that her sister Hendrika and Wilmot had arrived on the stoep. Hendrika was the eldest daughter of the second wife, and, as Hartley well knew, the aider and abettor of her mother in the internecine warfare with the old family. She was seventeen years of age, had had a superficial schooling for two years at Pretoria, and



had returned to the farm, as close an imitation of the town-bred girl as tight-lacing, town-made frocks, and a profuse use of perfumes could make her. She was by no means unprepossessing, and perhaps only an expert would have detected the Afrikaner by the lisping difficulty with the letter *r* which she shared with Clarie, and the ineradicable Afrikaner trick of emphasising superlatives by dwelling on the adjective in a shrill falsetto.

"Clarie, mother wants you," was her greeting.

Clarie regarded the summons as a subterfuge to take her from Hartley.

Mrs de Villiers was perpetually wanting her, if only to scold her for the sins of the children, or to tell her she had forgotten why she had called her.

Mrs de Villiers did have an object in sending for Clarie this time. It was to tell her that the peach-pie made for the evening meal was not to be mentioned in the presence of the visitors, but would be eaten after their departure; further, that the peach-brandy had been hidden, to prevent extravagant hospitality on the part of Piet; and thirdly, and most emphatically, that Clarie was a brazen hussy—only she used an opprobrious Taal equivalent—for gallivanting with the drunken Rooinek Hartley, when Johannes Smeer might arrive at any moment, and would in consequence get sick at heart at the sight of such perfidy, and ill-treat Clarie's little sisters, or, worse, carry out his threat of crippling Tessie, Clarie's little Kafir maid, by way of vicarious punishment for the sins of the mistress.

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Mrs de Villiers was an ideal Boer's wife, and carried out to the full that domineering mastership which the Boer husband accepts with lazy complacency. The ascendancy of the *vrouw* has never been understood or appreciated outside Afrikanerdom. By her, St Paul's injunction to wives, to submit themselves to their husbands in all things, is taken in obverse, like many New Testament precepts; and so long as women like Mrs Villiers remain, such interpretation will never suffer from heresy. The wives of Boerdom have made its history, from the Exodus known as the Great Trek of 1834 to Majuba and Colenso. Nor has the control been altogether undeserved, for in the majority of Boer households the female intellect is the more virile and initiative. Mrs de Villiers was the best possible wife for indolent backboneless Piet, and there were few Boer mothers who would not have justified her harshness to the children of the first wife on the grounds of duty to her own, since their claims, unless kept constantly in the forefront, would have been overlooked by Piet in weak preference for those of Clarie's sisters and brothers. So Mrs de Villiers fought for justice and equality by outraging the elementary principles of both, and sometimes earnestly prayed for strength and sustenance in her daily conflict against the attempts of Clarie to divide the household, by educating her own kin, and giving them notions of superiority over the little van Rooyens. By way of preventing the contamination of her own brood, she had strictly forbidden them to share the instruction given by the arch mischief-maker, but reserved the right to make it



In Boerdom

III

an indictment against Clarie that she wilfully neglected her step-sisters, and rejoiced in their exclusion from her offices.

The evening meal was soon after announced, and Wilmot had his first experience of the most trying ordeal a well-bred Englishman has to undergo when accepting Boer hospitality. He was not surprised to find that every member of the family, down to the infant toddler, had a place at the table, and having been prepared for the long-winded grace before meat, bore it without wincing, deriving genuine amusement from watching the youngsters preparing for attack on the material. They covered their faces with one hand devoutly, and peered through the open fingers at the morsel selected. As the long-awaited-for "Amen" was grunted by pa Piet, every fork flashed like a bayonet charge at the nearest dish, and a struggling contest at meat-sticking was conducted amid the exulting shouts of the victors and the whining complaints of the vanquished.

The feeding of a Boer family is not a spectacle to linger over or describe too accurately, and Wilmot saw as much to disgust as amuse him. Hartley, on the other hand, did not fail to perceive how much the influence of Clarie had toned down the young savages by dint of gentle perseverance.

Hendrika monopolised Wilmot. He was the type of man that would appeal to this self-centred innocent. She talked town, and suppressed the bucolic in her nature so successfully that, but for the damning evidence supplied by the rest of the family, Wilmot would

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have been as completely deceived as many a week-end invader of Boerdom, and have gone back to enthuse over the civilisation of the veld, and to denounce the extravagant exaggeration of the writers who declare they have seen the daughters of a Boer plutocrat going barefooted. Even Mrs de Villiers surrendered to the charm of the young Englishman, and kept him half an hour in the kitchen after supper, while she told him the history of her first husband, and detailed her own prowess as the concocter of four different medicines that could be taken with equal safety and advantage by man and beast.

When the youngsters had been packed four in a bed in two rooms that had to accommodate fourteen, and the handsome floor-lamp—a present from Smeer to Clarie—had been lighted in the sitting-room, the adults and some of the bigger girls forgathered there. Hendrika showed off the fruits of her two years' instruction on the twangy piano that had cost as much as an instrument of the highest class. Clarie talked with Hartley while she mended socks, and old Piet dozed in his chair, awaking now and then to relight his pipe or ask some question as to whether some item of the day's farm-work had been performed, a question that set the members of the circle disclaiming responsibility for the delivery of the original order, which was traced through a long line of emissaries till it arrived at the last who had forgotten to see it acted upon. The passing on of orders appeared to form the principal work of the day. As with the hydraulic-ram pump that supplied the water to the house, only about one-



seventh of the original stream reached its objective point, in consequence of the length and friction of the conducting pipe.

This sitting in the parlour of an evening was an innovation introduced by Clarie, and only tolerated by Mrs de Villiers because Hendrika approved. But she never ceased to grumble at the abandonment of the good old Boer custom of going to bed soon after sundown and the evening meal. As to Piet, his views on the matter did not count. Formal retirement to bed was not essential to sleep on his part.

He was awakened about eight o'clock to conduct the Bible reading and prayer which prefaced final closing of the day's exertions, and that he made a comparatively prompt business of, for he knew by heart the few chapters he always drew upon, and having but one prayer, got it off with the celerity that comes of practice, although of the orthodox length in the matter of phraseology.

This inability of her man to evolve an extemporaneous prayer was a standing grievance with Mrs de Villiers, who was a believer in the utility of the final invocation as a medium for expressing in open court that serious disapproval of the sins of members of the family which called for something more than maternal and secular reproof. The process was known as "laying it before the dear Lord," and Clarie's *laches* alone would have kept Piet retained as perpetual counsel for the prosecution had he possessed greater powers of advocacy. His obstinate refusal to introduce extraneous matter into his stereotyped prayer was the

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more irritating to Mrs de Villiers, for the reason that her husband had been compelled to confess that good results had followed the few instances in which he had sought the direct intervention of Providence. There was one case that had passed into local history. His mind had once been exercised as to the policy of buying a span of oxen on offer by a neighbour. He was disposed to make it a bargain, but Mrs de Villiers dissented, and suggested the arbitrament of a prayer for guidance and a sign. The sign came in the shape of a heavy rainstorm that flooded the river and kept the span on the other side for several days, during which lung sickness made its appearance among them, and Piet was saved a bad bargain and the probable loss of half his own herds. The late Johannes van Rooyen had been famous throughout his district for his creative and staying power on his knees, and his relict often recounted the story of his outpraying six champions of the Dopper Church at one Nachtmaal, thereby causing a breach in a thirty years' friendship with the beaten competitors.

The visitors were given the best bedroom, thanks to the good impression Wilmot had made upon Miss Hendrika and her mother. It is true, they would have had to share the same bed had not Hartley, with characteristic unselfishness and a tact for which few strangers would have given him credit, elected to sleep on the floor, alleging as his reason his long unfamiliarity with soft couches. Wilmot luxuriated in the big bed, a handsome modern affair of brass and steel, and the latest thing in springs. It had been



the show-piece in the window of a leading Pretorian furniture shop for an entire season. Wilmot had a woman's eye for detail, the result, probably, of the training inseparable from a life's association as the only boy in a large family, and, before composing himself for sleep, he made a tour of inspection round the first genuine Boer's bedroom he had seen.

The incongruous intermixture of coarseness and refinement, for which Hartley had prepared him, was amply manifest. The room was floored with dagga—anthill earth brought to a high stage of hardness and mahogany-like polish by frequent dressings of bullock's blood and kraal manure. The walls were of varnished match-boarding and the ceiling of canvas, that sagged low in the centre. The windows, like all such in Boer houses, were little more than hermetically sealed glass-protected apertures in the thick wall, though a woman's hand was apparent in the neat curtains of art muslin. It was also doubtless responsible for the clever manner in which the inevitable packing-case had been transformed into a showy cretonne- and muslin-draped dressing-table. Next to this stood a washstand that would have been more in place in the apartment of a duchess. It was the best that money could buy, and, like the bed, the outcome of one of the occasional outbursts of extravagance into which old Piet would be tempted when visiting Krugersdorp or Pretoria. The slop-pail that belonged to the ornate washstand had been commandeered for use in the dairy, and its place filled by a huge rusty Kafir cooking-pot, that had to be propped on one side



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with a brick. Then came a primitive gun-rack, constructed out of the omnipresent packing-case, left in all its native roughness, and by its side a beautiful Chippendale rosewood *escritoire*. The wardrobe was a row of hooks and nails draped with a curtain of cretonne. The walls were not without adornment in keeping with the general scheme of the room. An original sea-piece by Birket Foster was flanked by a gaudy lithographic advertisement of an enterprising cigarette manufacturer, while the framed certificates of proficiency earned by Clarie and Hendrika at their respective schools gave an academic tone to the gallery.

Wilmot had already been shown the bedroom of Miss Hendrika, the only member of the family who enjoyed the luxury of a separate apartment, and that exquisite young exotic had personally superintended the exhibition of her copious and variegated wardrobe, her travelling-trunk, her bottles of perfume, and the numerous articles of luxury which were sign and token of her position as the only person of taste in the family,—the favourite child of a mother who played her off against Clarie and the first family, and of a step-father who humoured her as the most effective method of conciliating his wife.



CHAPTER VII.

A BOER COURTSHIP.

THERE is an erroneous impression that the Boer emulates nature by going to bed with the sun and fowls and rising with it and them. On many remote farms this assumption would be correct; but the habit of undressing for sleep is growing, despite its vigorous condemnation by the older school as not only dangerous but indecent. As dressing again means exertion, disrobing, like most physical efforts in Afrikanerdom, is postponed as long as possible. This was one of the surprises that impressed Wilmot, and gradually led him to off-load much of his cargo of errors regarding the modern Boer. It is true, the younger children and Kafir servants at Rietspruit were up and about soon after sunrise; but it was well on to town time for breakfast before the heads of the family put in an appearance.

Clarie was the last to arrive, a circumstance which Hartley did not associate with indolence, but with the presence of the detested Johannes Smeer, who had made up for an entire day's absence by riding over very early. Hartley knew this unrepentant

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Boer, whose farm was adjacent to Rietspruit. He was a rugged, undersized man of about fifty, with shaggy head and beard, deep-set eyes, close together and beady, and a shrill voice that much amused the Kafirs, who after their discriminating fashion had labelled him with a wonderfully descriptive native name more apposite than nice.

"What did he call me?" was a query frequently on his lips when he had reason to believe that he was being discussed by the servants. The remorseless frankness of the children generally satisfied him that his suspicions were well-based, and the old man's sjambok and the native would renew old acquaintanceship.

As Clarie passed him on the way to her chair, Smeer caught her arm and pinched it playfully, making a coarse joke on her tardy entry, which set the young van Rooyens in a titter and made Hartley feel wicked. Her aversion was apparent, but not too glaringly expressed. She was careful not to irritate her Caliban by flouting him, or being more than reasonably civil to the other guests; but it required no student of physiognomy to see how much she loathed the present and prospective attentions of the man.

The conversation at table and the coarse but genially meant sallies of Smeer were in the Taal, of which Wilmot, fortunately, knew no word. Clarie would have felt less uncomfortable and humiliated had she not known that Hartley understood all. Her emollient disposition prompted her to give Smeer the



answer that turneth away wrath, but painful experience had shown her that such complaisance would be taken as a licence for further excesses; so she was perforce silent, thereby supplying her step-mother with excuse for railing at her for being *qwaai* and *qwaart* (particular and bad-tempered).

One of the young van Rooyens felt encouraged to lay a charge of overnight tyranny against Clarie, which was corroborated by Hendrika, and a family jar was only brought to an end by pa Piet thumping the table, threatening a physical intervention he dared not enforce, and commanding silence for the final grace. That over, the discordant elements dispersed into the back regions, Clarie gathered her pupils for the morning lessons, and Hartley and Piet sat down to smoke and discuss the affair of the waggon. Smeer hovered near the door of the schoolroom for a time, then, finding himself repulsed, joined Hendrika in her quest for the cow and calf she wished to exhibit to Wilmot as the nucleus of her marriage portion.

Boerlike, Piet had refrained from giving Hartley an answer to his proposal until he had discussed it with his wife, a business that had broken into a couple of hours of the night's rest, and been adjourned for reconsideration when the early coffee should be brought to their bedside. Mrs de Villiers' decision was in favour of lending a spare waggon and an inferior span of oxen, to be selected by herself, the terms to be £30 in advance, and two sovereigns a-day for the duration of the trip over the first fourteen days, with stringent conditions as to compensation

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for loss, damage, and depreciation. Further, and finally, use of the waggon was to be given only when it suited the convenience of the farm-work.

Piet presented this ultimatum, being careful to let Hartley understand that the terms were not his, but Mrs de Villiers'. Hartley formally protested against certain of the provisions, but did not press his objections. He knew that the firm of Piet & Co. were unconscious imitators of the famous legal partnership of Spenlow & Jorkins; and that while Piet was always prepared to concede points, Mrs Piet was adamant. He therefore intimated his acceptance of the hard conditions, and settled himself to smoke and listen, while Piet, Boerlike, began *de novo* to review the business, setting forth his reasons pro and con, laying particular stress on the inconvenience of lending waggon and oxen at this particular season, giving hints and instructions as to the best method of handling this beast or checking the over-zeal of another, the advice being suspended at frequent intervals for a life-history of the animal under consideration.

When in the course of a weary hour the matter had been exhausted, Hartley was requested to repeat all that he had told regarding the direction, objects, and duration of his journey. He complied, making the narration commendably brief. He was going north, he said, beyond the Zoutpansberg to try for diamonds at a spot he had prospected some years before, and the transport was needed for his valuable and heavy boring plant,—an explanation quite within the scope

of the understanding of a Boer like Piet, who had seen a little of mining men and matters.

Of course Hartley had to go over the story for the benefit of Mrs Piet. Tedious iteration is no crime in Afrikanderdom, but a necessity. There, converse, custom, and the daily dree are one monotonous revolving circle, repeating itself, like the round of the seasons, and scarcely interrupted by the death of those whose lives have been spent in squandering the years in vain repetitions.

Hartley bore the wearisome infliction without sign of impatience, first because he knew it was inevitable, but principally because he wished to delay his departure till Clarie had completed her morning task, and would be free to give him a few minutes. He was also secretly hopeful that something might occur to justify him in punching Smeer, though second thoughts satisfied him that such vengeance was not calculated to smooth the path of the woman for whom his latent affection and regard had been stimulated by the sight and knowledge of her sufferings so heroically borne.

The lessons that morning were unusually short, and the opportunity for a final chat with Clarie came sooner than Hartley had hoped. Smeer joined them as soon as they were seated on the stoep, and Hartley had an opportunity for appraising the nature of the persecution to which Clarie was subjected.

Smeer was obviously as much in love with the bright young woman as love was understood by elementary animal natures such as his. His method of showing

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his feelings was of a kind familiar among primitive people. He affected a juvenile boisterousness and joviality which would have been bearable but for his constant pinchings and playful punchings, while his verbal pleasantries were in the form of jests and comments known to students of the manners and customs of the contemporaries of the "Merry Wives of Windsor." At heart Smeer was a kindly simple creature, who had brought up a family, and fulfilled to his wife most of those obligations which, according to Boer standards, count for good husbandship; and as Mrs de Villiers had often truthfully observed, there were many Boer girls who would jump at the chance of "op sitting" with Johannes Smeer.

With a woman's quick perceptiveness Clarie saw how Hartley chafed under the persistent gaucheries of the man, and hastened to appease the growing wrath which she knew was not the best controlled of his weaknesses.

"Don't make it harder for me," she remarked in English, presuming on Smeer's unfamiliarity with that language.

The old man, however, was alert to any sign of understanding between the two.

"What was that? How am I hard for you?" He also spoke English. Clarie threw over reserve.

"He makes it hard for me," she said to Hartley, "because he wants much to marry me. Yet he knows that I am poor, and he would have me keep poor, for he has nothing."



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It was a bold avowal, even in view of the freedom of speech and utter absence of reticence and delicacy that characterise Afrikaner discussion of such subjects. Even the thick-skinned Smeer winced at the reflection on his unworthiness.

"I have a nice little place," he objected.

"But I have a nicer here."

"But you are not mistress."

"Better have a share in a little than be mistress of nothing."

Smeer showed that he felt cowed and humiliated in the presence of the Rooinek. Clarie saw it, and could not resist following up her advantage—

"If I were a man wanting a wife, I should first make her a nice nest to draw her: women love soft places."

"Ja; you have been spoiled by Rooineks, and are like them," Smeer answered sullenly.

"Then why do you want me? If you know that I am not like other Boer women, and really want me, make yourself so that I can like you. Get more money and oxen and—and wash oftener." She uttered the last words playfully, for Smeer was glowering.

Hartley joined in—

"That's fair, coos. Women like their men to have plenty of money now, and there's plenty to be made in the land. It's different to the old days."

"How can I get money?" He was still sulky.

"By riding transport," Clarie suggested.

It was quite unpremeditated, but the moment the words were out, she saw their pregnant possibilities.

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Might she not get this objectionable creature to fall in with her idea? It would at least free her from his importunities for a time.

"Hartley can tell you how to begin," she added, and glanced at her friend in a manner he could not mistake. "Help me," her look signalled.

Smeer's vacuous face lighted up.

"And would you marry me if I rode transport?"

He emphasised the question by grasping her arm with both hands, and putting his unwashed face close to hers, the contrast bringing out the transparent delicacy of her skin, for Clarie had preserved the bright wholesome complexion that most Boer maidens lose with girlhood. She gently put Smeer away as she answered—

"It would make me think better of you."

"Then I shall ride transport, though it's hard on an old man who only wants to rest."

"So you admit you are old?"

"Ja, but not too old to want you," and he hugged her arm again.

"No," she went on defiantly, feeling strong in her victory. "I am not a woman who can live in a kraal. Look at this frock and these shoes"—she spread out her well-made cloth dress and exposed her neat shoes. "This frock cost six pounds in Johannesburg, and these shoes thirty shillings. If I married you I should have to wear a Kafir blanket and go bare-foot." She laughed merrily at the picture. "Is not that right, Mr Hartley?"

"Ja, coos; Clarie is right," he responded. "You

want Clarie because she is nice and good to look at. She is that because she has learned how to be so from Rooineks. If you buy an ox because he is good-looking, you must feed him on the same sort of veld he has been used to."

The pastoral metaphor appealed to Smeer.

"Then must I get proper forage and veld," said he philosophically.

"That's it, coos," Clarie assented brightly, as she rose from the stoep and walked towards the ragged garden where the children were amusing themselves stolidly with a family of dolls constructed by Clarie out of mealie cobs and rags. She was proud of this evidence of encroaching civilisation, for young Boerdom knows not doll-dom.

The old man would have followed, but Hartley kept him back by continuing the parable. He knew Boer nature, and was an adept in handling it.

"Clarie is a *gwaai vrouw*, coos, and you don't know how to set about inspanning her. You must make a good paddock and have plenty of sweet grass, summer and winter, for her."

"Yes; but I can say that she will have it," Smeer answered with a sly upward glance.

"That will not be enough for Clarie. She is slim; she won't go in till she sees it. You must get more gelt, man. It's easy."

Smeer pondered, and puffed at his pipe, his eyes fixed on Clarie as she played with the children.

"You want transport, coos?" he said at last, very low.

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"Ja ; but I am going to hire Oom Piet's span."

"How much are you paying him?"

Hartley explained the arrangement.

Smeer's little eyes glistened as he looked furtively at Hartley and in a whisper said—

"You can *verneuk* Piet ; wait till he is using the waggon, then tell him you must have it. You can have mine for half what you pay him."

Hartley's impulse was to knock the creature off the stoep, but thought of Clarie restrained him. Instead, he said he thought the idea was good, and that he would think over it.

For the sake of peace, and to satisfy Smeer, he gave him a general idea of the proposed journey, and an assurance that if anything prevented the use of Piet's span he would accept the other's offer. In any case he engaged the old man's services as conductor. When terms were arranged to mutual satisfaction, Hartley put in one stipulation.

"You must say nothing more about marriage to Clarie till you have earned some money."

Smeer expressed assent with an interrogative "Ja?"

Hartley contrived to get a few minutes with Clarie free from interruption by Smeer before saddling up for the return. He told her what had passed, that he had engaged Smeer to accompany him, and had imposed an obligation of neutrality.

Clarie's face lighted up when she heard the joyful news. Then an afterthought saddened her. "I feel very mean for deceiving the old fellow," she said,



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"but I think I am justified. He would never take a refusal, and Mrs de Villiers would make my life a greater burden if I definitely refused him. He would never leave the farm till I withdrew it."

"It will give you a rest, anyhow," said Hartley. "It's a sleeping-draught."

"Yes, but there will be the awakening," she answered sadly.

"Leave that to me." He put his big hand on hers for a moment, and they sat in silence that was broken by the announcement that the horses were saddled.

Wilmot proved as tardy at departure as his friend. The horses got tired of waiting, and wandered off before he put in an appearance. He and Hendrika had been together all the morning. The vivacious girl, so oddly frank and simple, yet vain of her fancied superiority to other Boer maidens, amused and interested him; and she was equally attracted by the good-looking young man, whose knowledge of the manifold graces of the drawing-room enabled him to put this child into a new heaven and a new earth. He fed her vanity, and thrilled her by a mendacious assurance that she was a perfect English lady. The testimonial did not surprise her, for, as a passably good-looking and distinctly bright girl among very dull and mediocre schoolmates, she had, during the two years of her educational career, been the recipient of sufficient homage from young men who were not Boers to be prepared for Wilmot's confirmation of her secret belief that she was a fit subject for mas-

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culine adoration, and, sweeter still, for pedestal exaltation above all other Boer maidens. She felt for Wilmot the strong liking a simple girl has for those who flatter her, and the invitation she gave him to come over often was perfectly sincere.



CHAPTER VIII.

UNDERGROUND PRETORIA.

ON their return to the mine, the excursionists found that Adam had thoroughly and loyally performed his part of the contract. When admitted, with the customary reservations and precautions, to the sacred recesses of the workshop, they were shown the framework of the bogus headgear, finished in a workmanlike manner out of the best timber available on the property, and ready for the reception of the cartridges. Even Hartley was satisfied, though, for the sake of his own reputation as a mechanic, he found fault with a few details.

“Man, but your orrgan of destruction is dangerously developed. You’re the sort of thing that would find fault with a railway time-table because it was so full of figures,” was Adam’s only retort to the criticism.

Fortunately Hartley had no time to spare for justifying himself, as his train was shortly due. After a few words of counsel, and an emphatic injunction to both to exercise caution and silence, he left for the train.

When he had gone, Adam remarked—

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"There was a young wastrel inquiring for you this morning."

"What was his name?"

"I forget it; but he's an awful creature, a tricked-up monkey wi' the orrgans of acquisitiveness and secretiveness abnorrmally developed. He's a creature to keep away from, I'm thinking."

Further details, elicited laboriously, suggested Dale Ellis as the caller, and a few minutes later that individual sauntered from the direction of the native compound, where he had been keeping out of sight of Hartley, whose acquaintance he had no wish to renew.

He greeted Wilmot with customary affability, explaining his presence by his having been visiting Krugersdorp on business, and finding himself so near, could not resist the pleasure of looking in on an old friend. He did not mention that his friendship had stood the test of a four hours' dreary wait in hiding in the malodorous native quarters.

Wilmot introduced him to the ungracious and suspicious old Scot, who had plainly taken a great aversion to the smartly dressed young fellow. Like many old survivors of the mining-camp days, Adam had a peculiar contempt for well-dressed men, and was withering in his comments upon their appearance. He seemed to associate stiff collars with soft brains.

If, as was probable, Ellis noticed the want of warmth in his reception, he was too much a man of the world to show it. He produced a cigar-case, complimented Wilmot on his fit appearance, and flowed on so gaily

that Wilmot felt ashamed of the brusquerie of old Adam, and invited his visitor to the office for a drink. He was not satisfied as to the real reason for the visit, and his demeanour towards his guest was, in spite of himself, restrained.

But Ellis gave no excuse for unfriendliness. He chatted airily on any and every thing, told all that was likely to interest Wilmot about mutual acquaintances in Johannesburg, and hastened to remove any lurking fear that borrowing was his mission by ostentatiously flourishing a handful of notes, and inquiring as to the possibility of raising a bottle of champagne. He satisfied Wilmot's natural but unexpressed curiosity as to the source of so much opulence by declaring that the cards and horses had been running kindly of late, also that he had obtained employment of a kind consonant with the capacity and dignity of a gentleman.

Wilmot allowed him to chatter on till at length the thing he had all along feared happened.

"Got that business through yet?" Ellis asked carelessly.

Wilmot winced, but dared not pretend ignorance as to the meaning of the question. So he flew to the first refuge of the cowardly unready and lied.

"Oh, that fell through long ago. In fact, it was a mare's nest." He tried awkwardly enough to change the subject.

Ellis took no notice of the diversion.

"Pity—great pity. I could have put it through and got money in advance,—no waiting for delivery of goods."

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"But the whole thing was a mare's nest, I tell you."

"And you invented it all?"

"Suppose I did? I was drinking at the time."

Ellis did not push the matter farther. He appeared satisfied.

"You'll have to put me up to-night," said he.

"Very sorry, but there's no accommodation but the floor, and no spare bedclothes."

Adam came in at the moment.

"There's a train at ten o'clock that will suit you," he interposed, "and if you miss it, they have vara good hotels at Krugersdorp—almost up to what you are used to, I should say."

"In that case I won't put you out. I'll go, but I should have liked a crack over old times with my friend here. Come with me into the Dorp, Wilmot; I'll give you a night of it."

Again Adam interposed.

"He canna go. He's all behind with his worruk through being away so long. He'll have to stay up late to-night to get his books in order."

Wilmot mildly corroborated the invention.

Ellis accepted the rebuff without further argument, and announced his intention of finishing his cigar and whisky, and getting back to the Dorp. If his intention was to draw Wilmot into another conversation it was defeated by Adam remaining with them.

"You'll have to hurry to get in before dark. You'd better go now," the old man urged.



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Ellis surrendered to Scottish pertinacity, and said good-bye.

"What fools these honest men be!" he soliloquised as he walked over the veld. "A babe could see they've something to hide. And what a futile liar Wilmot is!"

"Who's your friend?" asked Adam magisterially. Wilmot told him, speaking as well of Ellis as he could, for he felt that both he and Adam had been unnecessarily inhospitable.

"He's a good enough fellow when you know him," he added.

"Man, but that's a fule's speech. Do you think I've nothing better to do than cultivate the acquaintance of every wastrel I meet, just to find out what's inside him? If the surface indications aren't promising, I'm not going to waste time in sinking a shaft."

"But that's what you do with every man you meet. It's the nature of your science."

"That shows your ignorance and absence of the faculty of causality. My science enables me to judge by the surface indications whether it is worth while going deeper," and Adam being provided with a text, started on a verbose explication.

Wilmot let him go on, for he was in no mood for talk. Ellis's visit had seriously perturbed him, and confirmed what he had all along suspected,—that on the night of their dissipation and in the flush of excitement consequent on realising that he had a valuable secret, he had yielded to vanity and whisky and talked too much. The suspicion had haunted

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him ever since; now he knew it was well grounded, and he felt ashamed and sorry, for had he not lied to Hartley when that penetrative analyst of weak character had expressed misgivings?

He spent a restless night weighing probabilities, and formulating all sorts of more or less wild and dangerous projects for undoing the initial error.

His mind was diverted from the unpleasant subject next morning by the receipt of an answer to one of his inquiries after the engineer. His correspondent supplied the information that Bolton was to be found at Pretoria, where he was engaged on one of the railway surveys then in progress near the capital. He reported progress to Adam, and after a qualified assent from the cautious Scot, wrote to Hartley in guarded and cryptic language, announcing his intention of looking up the only man likely to assist in the solving of the mechanical puzzle.

Hartley replied promptly, approving, and arranging to meet Wilmot at the Park Station, Johannesburg, on his journey to the capital.

During the few days that passed before Wilmot's departure for Pretoria, several men called at the mine in quest of employment. This circumstance would not have been worth notice ordinarily, for the newspapers had announced that developing work had started on the Resurgam; but Adam's experienced eye detected that the applicants lacked most of the signs of the *bond-fide* seeker for a job on a mine. They were too eager to take anything that offered, and employment was indicated as being a greater



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consideration than payment, in a manner too unanimous and emphatic not to excite suspicion. Even the most needy seeker for work has pretty definite ideas as to the value of his services: these men were too ardent in their adhesion to the doctrine of the dignity of labour.

Unfortunately Adam did not mention his suspicions of the callers to Wilmot. He was not disposed to provoke another attack on his propensity for diagnosing every head he saw. He contented himself with warning him to be very careful in Pretoria, and sent him off with a parting assurance that the journey would be only waste of time, for it was thousands to one on the engineer proving a blethering, boasting ignoramus.

Wilmot had taken the precaution to make a final examination of the Maxim, so as to have its working principle thoroughly in his mind: a diagram would be too dangerous a thing to carry.

The first question Hartley put when, punctual to appointment, he met Wilmot at Park Station, was, "Have you anything on you in the way of a drawing?" Nor would he be satisfied till he had carefully examined such letters and scraps of paper as Wilmot had in his pockets.

The two walked to a retired spot to talk. Hartley had his contribution to the plan of campaign in the useful form of a commission to Wilmot to call at the office of the Minister of Mines to verify the diagrams of certain gold claims in which the Yorkshireman was interested. This would provide a reasonable

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motive for the visit to the capital, and if the stay had to be prolonged, no one who knew Government methods would be surprised that a simple business should entail days of waiting. He gave Wilmot ten pounds towards expenses, and with a strict reminder to keep away from whisky, which he accentuated by refusing to offer or accept a parting glass, saw the train off.

Pretoria, always interesting to English visitors during the Kruger *régime*, was doubly absorbing at this period. Boerdom was revelling in its apotheosis. The excitement attendant on the abortive Reform movement and the Jameson Raid had hardly begun to cool down. The Reformers were still in jail, and the capital was a centre of interest for half the civilised world. Never before had it been so full of mixed humanity. Field-cornets from remote districts, who had never till now seen the Mecca of Boer officialdom, sympathetic representatives of the sister Free State and Cape Colony, German concession-hunters, seeking the reward of the loyalty of their country to the threatened but triumphant Republic, newspaper "specials," globe-trotters, and a crowd of friends of the incarcerated revolutionists, swarmed in the hotels and public places, giving to life in the town a bustle and vitality that contrasted strangely with Wilmot's preconceived notions of the sleepy Boer capital, as derived from many a book of travellers' immatured impressions.

He put up at a small third-rate hotel, where he had to share the usual double-bedded room with the Jewish



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representative of an illicit liquor syndicate, full of wrathful indignation at having been refused accommodation at the Transvaal and Grand, "Ath if I couldn't pay, ven I could buy the blethed place."

Wilmot set out to make cautious inquiries, and found his man without difficulty, inviting him to dine that evening at the Transvaal Hotel, whose chef was famous in the land.

The business was tactfully managed, the *rencontre* appearing to be the most casual accident, and the dinner a natural civility. Wilmot cautiously awaited his opportunity, which did not arrive till the pair were finishing a pleasant evening over cigar and glass in the rooms of Bolton. It was easy to introduce the subject of the Reformers and the Raid; it was the standing dish at every conversation, but the matter of their hidden arms required careful handling. Wilmot carelessly sought Bolton's opinion as to the grounds for the popular notion that only part of the munitions had been surrendered. The engineer favoured the assumption, adding that, even if discovered, they would be found useless, for he had heard that the magazines and bolts of the rifles had been removed from the few that had been discovered.

The rest was easy. Wilmot appealed to Bolton's superior mechanical knowledge to explain how a Maxim gun could be dismantled, and for once he found that a man given to bragging of his special knowledge had excuse for his boast. Bolton clearly knew what he was talking about, and as Wilmot

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pleaded ignorance of the construction of a Maxim, a rough working diagram was obligingly drawn to assist the explanation. It provided all that Wilmot needed to know, and he was delighted and surprised to discover that old Adam's suggested remedy was, in principle, correct, and required only the addition of certain modifications that Wilmot was now in position to provide. He studied the drawing with a careful thoroughness that even Adam would have confessed argued considerable development of the organ of causality, and saw the cautious engineer burn the diagram without regret, for he knew its secret was safely stored in his own consciousness and memory.

Next morning Wilmot sent a brief but sufficiently explicit telegram to Hartley, announcing his success; called at the office of the Minister of Mines as a matter of form, and spent the rest of the day in exploring a town that is well worth the trouble of dissecting, intending to return the following day. He dined again, but alone, at the Transvaal Hotel, feeling that his success justified the indulgence.

At the same table were two young Hollanders, volatile Bohemians, not long from the gaieties of Brussels, Antwerp, and Paris, with a taste in passing of London; both cosmopolitans in the best sense of the word. Wilmot had met a few of their type in Johannesburg, and was ever after angry with his countrymen for holding such insular notions of foreigners, particularly of Hollanders. He could not disguise from himself that these youngsters were much



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more delightful company than most Britishers of his acquaintance in the country; they were so polished and versatile, such thorough men of the world. He had ceased to wonder that the Boer should regard the Hollander as more alien to him than the Briton; he could understand how speech and manners, and an almost feminine fastidiousness, that the coarser-fibred product of a rugged soil had been taught to despise, should be a standing source of irritation and offence. The Boer had a right to expect something nearer to himself in representatives of a race claiming common origin. The Colonial Briton came much closer, in dress, tastes, and occupation. The Hollander was ever a supercilious, finicking, posturing thing of fine linen and a mincing speech more difficult of comprehension than the English as spoken by the bluff honest Scotsmen and Yorkshiremen who formed a large leaven in Boerdom.

Wilmot was instinctively a student of character types, and these young men interested as well as charmed him. They were bright and amusing, and spoke fluent and literary English, with just enough accent to bring out its points. One of them gave a side-splitting and wondrously accurate imitation of Paul Kruger in the tantrums in the Raad, that even compelled to laughter two solemn Boers from up-country, sitting at the next table.

After dinner Wilmot was invited to join his acquaintances in a round of calls at the semi-private retreats that provided eclectic entertainment for those in possession of the open sesame, as these Hollanders

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were. They proved a revelation to Wilmot, as they were to many a Burgher who fancied he knew Pretoria, until taken in hand by an initiate who had kept pace with its growth in the knowledge of the inner and secret vices of European cities. Wilmot smiled as he recalled some of the historical denunciations of the corruptness of Johannesburg which Paul Kruger and certain guileless members of the moral party thundered forth at times, and he marvelled at the daring irony of the advisers and heads of departments, who unblushingly claimed for the President the title of the best informed man in his country. If, Wilmot argued, a stranger and alien like himself could learn so much of the inner life of the capital in a single evening, how could those in authority be ignorant of the existence of so huge a moral cesspool?

He did not know that his guides were two of the most astute members of that newly organised bureau of secret service which, as after-events proved, had nothing to learn from the methods of the most spy-ridden countries of Europe.

It is to be feared that Wilmot could not, with a clear conscience, have made a solemn declaration that he had borne in mind throughout that exciting and pleasant evening the warning of Hartley as to looking on the wine. How could he, with decency, refrain from sharing the hospitality so gracefully pressed upon him by these well-behaved, fastidious young citizens of the world? There was nothing vulgar about them or their potations. They drank like epicures of the best, generally produced by an



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obsequious barman—a strange and anomalous feature—from a private store, apparently reserved for special clients. They carefully eschewed the liquor of the public bar, and warned Wilmot against it, giving details of its origin and composition that argued peculiar inside knowledge.

The acquaintance was renewed quite accidentally, it seemed, next day. Wilmot did not marvel that Pretorian officials, as they acknowledged themselves to be, should have so much time at their disposal, neither did he see anything strange in their marked predilection for his company. This was prettily explained by a casual remark of the elder of the two.

“We Hollanders suffer much from ennui among these dull Boers, and it gives spice to existence to meet a man like you who knows what life is.”

Wilmot found the philanthropic task of assisting in the dispersal of ennui much more pleasant than one's duty to his neighbour usually is, and laboured hard at it during the day and the evening. It was well towards midnight when he reluctantly dragged himself away, determined to return to Johannesburg by the first train in the morning.

The road to his hotel lay past one of the numerous low-class canteens that flourished in the capital. When opposite it, he was accosted by a decently dressed Kafir, speaking English intelligibly.

“Baas,” said the native, in pathetic tone. “Wife very sick. Must have brandy. They won't serve Kafirs. Buy two shillings'-worth for me.” He thrust a small flask and a coin into Wilmot's hand. The

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Kafir, noticing the hesitancy, repeated his request imploringly, adding, "Wife will die without brandy."

Wilmot entered the bar, purchased the liquor, and brought it out to the Kafir, who was crouching in the shadow, but rose promptly, snatched the flask, and, hastily removing the cork, began to drink.

Before Wilmot could express his indignation at the brutal selfishness that would rob a dying woman, if only a Kafir, he felt a hand on his shoulder. A man in plain clothes and a constable were beside him.

"I arrest you for supplying liquor to a native," said the man, who led him into the canteen. "Did you serve this man with brandy just now?" he demanded of the barman, who looked horribly scared, and hesitated.

The detective went behind the bar, opened the till, and, turning out its contents on to the counter, rapidly examined the coins and picked out a florin.

"This is a marked coin. Did you receive it from the prisoner?"

The barman assented.

Wilmot was too dazed and astounded to remember much more, except that he was walked between two men along what seemed miles of streets, until they reached a brilliantly lighted office, where a man in uniform wrote something in a big book dictated by the detective; then more bustling by two men, a short walk across a yard, the opening of a black door that revealed even greater blackness, a push that sent him sprawling on all-fours into the dark aper-



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ture, a slamming of the door behind him, then unconsciousness.

The manner in which Wilmot had been projected into the cell was in accordance with the approved system introduced by a German inspector of police. It had always been found most effective in quietening for some time an obstreperous and violent prisoner. He generally fell heavily forward, striking his head against the end wall, which brought on mild concussion of the brain, and wrenching one or both elbows against the door-posts with sufficient severity to render the arms useless long after the brain had resumed its functions. The Pretorian zarps were proud of their adroitness in this accomplishment; and with some reason, for they had rarely killed a victim with it, and Wilmot proved one of their successes.

He lay quiet for an hour, and when reason returned the pain in his right arm induced him to remain quiescent, trying to guess what had happened. But the thinking process proved sadly tangled; nor did the liquor he had partaken of so freely during the evening, and in fact throughout the entire day, conduce to clarity of intellect.

A sudden dash of cold water over his head had a very sobering effect. He turned over, and in the dim light of the dawning day saw a man standing over him with a bright tin can in his hands.

"Pull yourself together, man. You've got to face the Landdrost soon," a rough but friendly voice drawled.

Wilmot tried to raise himself on his elbow, but the pain caused him to collapse with an exclamation.

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"Gave you the push, eh?" The man stooped down and passed his hand over Wilmot's head, and felt the injured arm.

"Nothing broke; you've come off light. Must have amateurs on duty; they chucked me, but did no damage. Been making a night of it?"

Wilmot got with difficulty into a sitting posture, and, as he wiped his drenched head with his sleeves, his handkerchief having been taken from him, asked stupidly where he was.

"In No. 6, Pretoria police station; brought in with a run about one o'clock this morning. Been balmy three hours," the man answered with business-like alacrity, as if reading from an official entry.

"I can't quite remember how I came," Wilmot began.

The man laughed.

"It's often so. Been that way myself. Don't know what happened to me after I was thrown out of the bar—don't even remember which bar."

"But I was not drunk; I was going home quietly when I was arrested. No; I was stopped by a Kafir——"

The man laughed again.

"Don't worry your head; police will tell you all about it when you get into court. Five pounds or a month; that's Pretoria rate, so long as you didn't punch a zarp. Pretoria policemen are tender."

Wilmot grew angry, and protested that he was not arrested for drunkenness. He tried to piece his story together.



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"Oh, liquor to natives, eh? Seventy-five or three months for first offence; hundred or nine for second. Got the money all right, I suppose?"

Wilmot bottled his anger, and made a fairly clear statement of his case, as well as his yet half-dazed condition permitted; but the man was still incredulous, and bluntly told him he was a fool to humbug himself.

"Leave it all to your solicitor; he knows how to manage these things."

"But I have no solicitor."

The man looked genuinely surprised.

"Then you're a new hand. Old stagers always have these things arranged for."

Wilmot recognised the impossibility of convincing the man of his innocence, so abandoned the attempt and became catechist in turn. "My case? oh, the usual, drunk and disorderly. I'm Jim Steevens; must know me if you read the police reports. Got a private cell at the Johannesburg lock-up; patronised this hotel several times; they're beginning to know me, so expect the tariff will go up this time. Hope I didn't punch a zarp last night. Don't generally. They sneak your cash if you do, and leave nothing to pay the fine. Always go quiet, that's my motto; saves a lot of knocking about. But these zarps do tempt me; they're frightened out of their lives of me. Lord! how the people at home would laugh if they knew what these poor devils have to put up with from Uitlanders like me! They generally inspan half the force to run me in," and he laughed at the recollection.

Wilmot could not help envying the airy indifference

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of the man. It was a most striking illustration of familiarity breeding contempt, and, in a way, it cheered him amid the vague terror of the unknown charge hanging over him.

A constable opened the cell and spoke to Steevens, who seemed equally at home with the language and customs of the place. "He wants to know what you'll have for breakfast," he interpreted. "He says you've got several pounds. Come out into the sun."

He set the example by walking out into the sunny yard, where several other dishevelled Europeans sat about, while the Kafirs sluiced out the cells. Steevens sat on an upturned bucket.

"It's all sèrene. He says I've got some money too, which shows I didn't punch a policeman. I'll order the breakfast."

Wilmot felt in his pockets. Every coin and loose article had been removed. Steevens noticed the action and laughed.

"Any one can see you're new at the business. Fancy feeling in your pockets after the police have been through you! Wonder they left the lining. But they're pretty good here. I have generally got my money back; but Johannesburg!—jeerusalem!—they'd take your boots there if they were good enough. Bring my pipe," he shouted to the departing constable, who shortly returned with it and a tobacco-pouch, and part of a cigar which had been found on Wilmot. He entered into conversation with Steevens. "Seems I'm not so lucky as I thought," said Steevens, when the constable went away. "I was rowdy, and shouting





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'Down with Kruger!' I'm death on politics when I get full. That will mean a tenner or a month, and I've only got about a pound. Ah, well, there are worse places than Pretoria jail for a short stay. There's a hanging due there—shouldn't mind seeing that."

A passable breakfast, procured from an adjacent hotel, was brought in, and killed the time till nine o'clock, when the party was marched to the Landdrost's Court, the first half-dozen white prisoners leading, and about fifty Kafirs and Indians following.

Steevens' was the first case dealt with. He proved an accurate prophet.

"Ten pounds or a month," he remarked to Wilmot as he rejoined him in the yard.

When Wilmot's turn came he was placed in a railed compartment. An interpreter, whose English was that of the English-speaking Dutchman of Cape Colony, stolidly repeated the reading of the charge, which was that he, Graham Wilmot, did wilfully contravene section so-and-so of Law Number 216, to which he pleaded not guilty.

The man in plain clothes, who had arrested him, went into the witness-box and declared that, as the result of knowledge and suspicion of the prisoner, he had kept him under observation for two days; but owing to the criminal's astuteness in avoiding detection, he had set a native trap or detective to catch him in the act.

The Kafir who had personated the husband seeking brandy for a dying wife told his story with comparative

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accuracy, and the barman having identified the prisoner as the person served, and the flask as that which he had filled with brandy, the Landdrost proceeded to pronounce sentence with a celerity that gave the lie to the stories of magisterial tardiness in the Transvaal.

"Seventy-five pounds or three months' hard labour."

"Going to pay?" the interpreter asked.

"I have no money," was all that Wilmot could think of to reply, and he was hustled into the yard.

"Any one can see you're innocent," Steevens was good enough to remark, as Wilmot, dazed and stiff, sat by him on a form. "I always know 'em by the way they act in court. But, Lord! it doesn't matter what you say or do. If you show 'em you aren't afraid, and cross-examine the lying witnesses, and catch 'em out, Landdrost says to himself, 'He's an old hand, knows all the tricks.' If you are green you get bowled out through not knowing how to make the best of your case. Got friends who'll pay up, I suppose?"

"I don't know. I hardly know whether I'm awake or dreaming," Wilmot answered.

He awoke thoroughly when, two hours later, he, with the rest of the convicted prisoners, was marched to the jail.

Standing on the pavement just outside the gate of the courtyard was a group of well-dressed young men, and among them his Hollander acquaintances of the previous day. They stared hard at him as he passed, and the elder laughed,—a fiendish, triumphant, contemptuous laugh, that haunted Wilmot for many a day.



CHAPTER IX.

PRETORIA JAIL.

THE moralists who find material for sermons in the far-reaching potency of personal influence would probably not select Jim Steevens as an exemplar, unless as an illustration of the obverse of the medal. But in the after-days, when he could review the matter calmly, Wilmot always confessed that he had never really known what personal influence meant until he walked with the reckless philosophical ne'er-do-well inside the gate of Pretoria jail. The cheerful optimism and refusal of the man to look at fate seriously was infectious, and robbed the thought of arrest and unjust punishment of half its horrors. Very shame prevented his yielding to the despair and humiliation he felt, in the presence of a man who met misfortune with a smile; and when he found himself standing in the great yard of the jail, surrounded by fellow-convicts as cheerful as Steevens, the sense of novelty and curiosity was dominant over all other feelings. Another and very important factor in the sum-total of circumstances that contributed to Wilmot's equable frame of mind was the absence of that repellent gloom

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and atmosphere of silent woe that, like most persons, he had always associated with prisons and all that appertained thereto.

Pretoria jail, never an abode of gloom, was at that day famous for laxity of discipline and its freedom from most of those features that render such institutions unpopular, as was proved by the extraordinary rarity of unauthorised and premature departures on the part of its inmates. It is true that long-term prisoners, indulgently allowed to go into town to transact urgent private business, were no longer refused readmission on returning late; but at this period the jail was, in the opinion of authorities, more than endurable. The presence of a large crowd of the victims of the Revolution, though it inconvenienced the ordinary prisoners in the matter of accommodation, called for so much attention from the always undermanned staff that normal conditions were relaxed; and it speaks well for the considerateness of those thus inconvenienced that they not only refrained from exacting from their guardians a full and strict performance of their duties, but overlooked numerous derelictions, and even undertook many little offices, thereby giving their warders more time and opportunity for making themselves useful to the political prisoners, who were not tardy in recognising such services in the form most familiar and eloquent on the Rand.

Thus it came about that several prisoners had been deputed to perform for their fellows offices that, in the ordinary course, would have been expected of



the warders; and except for occasional accusations of favouritism or shirking, the arrangement worked well. One of these deputies recognised Wilmot, and advised him to carry his bed from the gloomy cell at first assigned him to No. 4, a spacious apartment where the more experienced eye of Steevens detected evidences of a settled and advanced civilisation. As usual, his judgment proved sound, for the prisoners there were the *élite* of the company. They consisted of a Government railway clerk of indeterminate nationality, but speaking most European tongues, expiating the crime of embezzlement; an illicit liquor defaulter, who had taken the option of six months, yet had a convenient and puzzling command of ready cash for the purchase of forbidden luxuries; two famous highwaymen, who had come to grief over the holding up of the mail-coach; and a genial old Boer of ruddy and cheerful countenance, who had yielded to primordial impulse under the provocation of a vrouw with a bitter tongue, and silenced her with an axe. He had gone through the formality of listening to the death-sentence, and was now meandering placidly through the two years' imprisonment which was the Draconian alternative to hanging.

A less criminal-looking assembly, judged by the traditional standard, could scarcely be conceived, and certainly no community could have been more harmonious and mutually considerate. They received Wilmot kindly, and made him free of the "club" at once,—a privilege that was not extended to Steevens, who found congenial companionship elsewhere with



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a fellow-victim of the Pretorian prejudice against demonstrative drunkards.

The cell-system usual in most prisons did not exist in the Pretoria institution. Originally a fort erected during the British occupation, it retained practically its first form. A large open space capable of providing a cricket pitch was surrounded on four sides by one-storeyed buildings that had been converted into receptacles for prisoners by slightly strengthening walls and doors and piercing small windows high up and barring them. These bars were the only evidence of restraint visible except the one or two Kafir prisoners who were in irons as the consequence of an attempt to escape. The white prisoners occupied the series of low rooms to the left of the entrance. They opened out of an open corridor, and were built with an irregularity and absence of system that suggested they had been added as required. On the right were a row of iron cottages or single rooms devoted to debtors and special prisoners. The Reformers occupied several detached buildings that at various stages of their history had been residences and store-rooms. The natives were kept well segregated at the top end of the yard, a wide white line across the ground marking the limits of their domain.

During the day prisoners had the run of the yard, though according to the rules they were supposed to keep to their cells; but only an officious young warder ever attempted to enforce this regulation, which was not abused, the prisoners squatting or walking in the sunshine, and reserving any exuberance of manner or

speech for the seclusion of their apartments, which accommodated from ten to four occupants apiece.

Wilmot soon found that Steevens was right when he observed there were worse places than Pretoria jail. Doubtless there was room for improvement in the diet, which, though ample, was coarse and unequal in quality; but, as an old hand explained, if the prisoners complained, and insisted, as they might, on the due performance of the Government's feeding contract, the authorities might retaliate by compelling the malcontents to perform their more onerous and well-defined obligations. As the balance of advantage at present lay with the prisoners, they discreetly held their tongues, and put up with weevily mealies and leathery trek-ox beef, in consideration of the extra indulgences that uninterrupted laxity permitted.

"We are only waiting till our friends send our fine-money," Steevens explained to the orderly clerk who took names and particulars next day; and on the strength of that assurance, backed by the letters he and Wilmot wrote as soon as they could get material and permission, they were exempted from having to put on prison clothes, and by virtue thereof gained that respect and prestige which the other prisoners attached to *détenus* during their own pleasure.

Wilmot wrote a guarded letter to Hartley, giving a full account of his misfortune, authorising him to take from his bag the fifteen pounds that he would find there. As to the balance, he ventured to hope that Hartley would provide it somehow, for the energetic Yorkshireman was hardly likely to allow an

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important ally in a great enterprise to be put out of action for the sake of sixty sovereigns; and, as prison-life had not proved so irksome as he had feared, he was quite content to wait till rescued. Steevens was equally resigned. He had appealed to a friendly canteen-keeper.

"I'm worth two hundred a-year to him," said he, "and he's not going to lose a good customer for the sake of a tenner! Self-interest keeps more friends than love." And he ticked off the instances in which his fines had been paid by the canteen-keepers among whom he regularly distributed his earnings.

Steevens was a type of the skilled artisan much in evidence on the Rand,—a thoroughly capable mason, earning easily fifty pounds a-month when sober, and equally thorough in the alcoholic outbursts which were the objective point of his life.

"Every man has his own idea of pleasure after toil," said he; "mine's a good spree, and I always get it, but I don't generally get as far as this. In Johannesburg I should have raised the money before I left the court, but I'm out of my bearings in Pretoria. Never get drunk outside your own lines."

Wilmot reckoned on hearing from Hartley within the next four days, and settled down to exercise that power of adapting himself to circumstances which Adam had denied as an attribute of Englishmen. There was much that was novel and interesting in this strange experience. The other prisoners were extremely friendly and sympathetic, and in a day or two made him an honorary member of the "Gang."



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This means that he was initiated into numerous ingenious tricks for obtaining indulgences and evading the irksomeness of such regulations as were insisted upon. He was shown how to conceal the forbidden tobacco, matches, and pipe; how to arrange his bed-clothes into a tent, under which he could read by the light of a little lamp, made out of an ink-bottle and a wick twisted out of strands pulled from the coarse blankets. He was put in possession of the peculiarities of the various jail officials, from the irascible old governor, ruled by his wife and daughters, down to the youthful boy-warrior, whose joy and delight was to have charge of the flogging that provided a daily excitement and diversion. He had ample opportunity for noting how keen and accurate readers of character men may become when the question of their own ease or suffering is dependent upon their quickness in diagnosing by a glance the temper and humour of a warder; and knowing the right thing to say, or, what was equally important, the thing not to say. He was promised, after portentous warning of the consequences of betrayal, admittance to certain secrets by which the doctor could be bamboozled into ordering a prisoner to that Elysium, the Infirmary. But this most appreciated of the privileges won by cunning was held too precious to abuse, and no prisoner dared attempt to avail himself of the key without consent of the Gang. A systematic order was observed in the exercise of the right to "lay up," and as the connivance of the others was always necessary to ensure selec-

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tion, unauthorised malingering was rarely attempted, and never successful.

As is ever the case with officials, those who required the greatest care in handling were the young and freshly appointed, whose zeal had not been tempered by experience. One such would detect, apparently by scent alone, the unlighted pipe thrown hurriedly beneath a bed, while an older warder on his tour of inspection would be so blinded by the smoke from half a dozen pipes that he was unable to observe the glowing bowls held in the hollow of the palm, and would go out to report "no irregularities." It was the same with the sense of touch. A young warder would discover the end of a cigarette or the "striker" of a match-box in a turned-up trouser on a prisoner returned from working with the road parties, while an older man would fail to notice the flask of whisky or paraffin-oil inside the shirt or cap.

The task of breaking-in and educating these over-zealous youngsters was left to the old hands. It was easy to ensnare the youth into some glaring breach of regulations after a time, and the rest was easy. "If you cannot pay me, don't worry me," was the old warders' motto, and no prison staff had less cause to complain of undue fussiness on the part of their charges. The discipline exerted by the potent Gang was more severe than that at command of the guardians. The man who irritated a warder became a common enemy, and rarely repeated the offence.

Of the subterranean passages for communication



with the outside, Wilmot was not made free. That was the best preserved of all the secrets of the prison-house. He saw only results, and discreetly resisted the promptings of curiosity to know more, though the secret would have been safe with him, as it is with every man who has learned it. It is a strange but well-attested fact that the higher degrees in the freemasonry of prison-life are rarely revealed to the outside world. May it not be that the sympathy that is best learnt in suffering acts as the seal? There are old and experienced jail officials who know less of these secrets than many a prisoner who has been but a few months under their care.

The fourth day came, but brought no letter from Hartley. Wilmot made anxious inquiry through half a dozen channels, official and otherwise, but no envelope addressed to him lay in the gatekeeper's lodge; and for the first time he gave way to depression. This was noticed by the storekeeper, an educated, handsome young German, serving two years for an ingenious cheque fraud. There were few secrets among prisoners, and the storekeeper guessed the cause of the Englishmen's heaviness.

"You shall have diversion," he said kindly. "You shall help with the floggings. There are eight for noon to-day."

Wilmot winced, but Carl hastened to explain that the help would be limited to taking charge of the cats and the bucket of salt water.

"There's a coolie and a Shangaan to be lashed; they squeak funny, and make you laugh."

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The prospect of amusement did not weigh so much with Wilmot as a morbid desire to see for himself a thing much talked of. These lashings were justified or condemned so vigorously that he felt interested to know the truth about them, especially as those who had so much to say had not been able to speak with the authority of knowledge.

Wilmot carried a pail of salted water and four cats to a corner of the jail-yard, screened by the end of the cells. Up till a few months before, the triangle had been sloped against the wall of the prison in full view of all in the yard; but out of consideration for the feelings of the Reform prisoners, and possibly of those of their numerous visitors, the comparative privacy of the sheltered corner had been adopted. Wilmot examined the cats before he left the store, and was surprised at their innocent appearance—a handle fifteen inches long, with nine lashes of what looked like ordinary blind-cord, each lash knotted towards the end with nine small knots. An ordinary riding-switch seemed a terrible thing by comparison, but he had not seen them in use.

The eight victims were the first-fruits of the harvest of the Criminal Session Court then sitting, and ranged from an umfaan of sixteen, sentenced to fifteen and six months for stealing some trifle from his mistress, to a grizzled old Zulu of nearly seventy, who had earned two years and thirty-six lashes for that most heinous of crimes, sheep-stealing. The German jail doctor had certified them all fit for punishment by applying a stethoscope to their lungs and heart. The



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regulations required his attendance during the flogging; but he did not put in an appearance till the third man was being dealt with.

When Wilmot reached the corner the eight natives were standing in a group watching a native constable placing in position against the wall a wood frame like the back legs of a very wide step-ladder. This was the triangle, so called probably because it was a trapezoid. Three or four warders lounged around, awaiting their turn to use the lash, among them the boyish warder, whose prowess in the art of wielding the cat was the talk of the jail.

The first victim called was Sixpence, a big, well-developed young Zulu, with a round, stupid face and a fixed smile of mingled amusement and curiosity. He had looked on at the preparations with interest, and stepped briskly up to the triangle and watched the fastening of his wrists by the Kafir constable, as if trying to find out how it was done. When properly spread-eagled, he turned and glanced over his shoulder and grinned good-humouredly, eyeing the warder as he shook the brine from the cat with a preliminary crack. The nine lashes spread out widely over the naked shoulder and back. Sixpence gave a startled spring, remarked "Inkoos!" as a petulant child might say "Don't," and tried to see what the cat had done to his back. A warder counted "een, twee, drie," till "fijftien." During the lashing Sixpence made no other sound; but the smile and look of surprise had given way to an expression of genuine annoyance, as if the joke he had anticipated had been

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carried too far. When cast loose, he made further efforts to examine the work of the lash, which was interrupted by the Kafir constable sousing him from neck to waist with a sponge dipped in salt water. He gave a writhe, and set about dusting and straightening his shirt, that had been lying on the ground. The stolidity of the creature astounded Wilmot, who could hardly believe his eyes when he saw him coolly squat against the wall, and with a laugh settle himself to watch the next performance. The subject was a Shangaan, one of a tribe held in contempt by Zulus, and reputed to be the most cowardly of the natives known in the Transvaal. He did not belie the reputation. He began to whine before the tying-up was completed, let out a piercing shriek as the boy-warrior cracked the cat, and drowned the swish of the first cut with a howl that sent a curious thrill through Wilmot's entire body. The cut had brought blood, as the boy-warrior boasted his cuts always did, for he employed the drawing stroke, which ploughs the flesh into nine furrows from shoulder to waist. The incompetent flogger allows the thongs to rebound from the flesh, leaving little more than a number of bead-like lumps and discolorations. Before the twenty lashes were half counted Wilmot quite understood what he had heard urged against the inequality of the punishment of the lash, since ten strokes by an expert like this young savage would cut the flesh to ribbons, while thirty from another wielder of the cat would barely mark the skin.

A half-starved, frightened coolie was next spread-



eagled, and the fun began, as promised by the young German. He struggled, shrieked, and implored in Dutch, Kafir, and his own language, and was half-dead with terror before the exertions of three Kafir constables had secured him. Sixpence enjoyed the spectacle immensely, and stopped rubbing his own lacerated back to stand up and watch the scene. Even the wretches awaiting their turns laughed at the contortions and howls, and the boy-warder was too convulsed with merriment to be able to begin. He had volunteered for the task, because, as he remarked, he hated coolies worse than Kafirs—a comment heard and understood by its subject, who renewed his anticipatory howls and struggles.

The butchery that followed turned Wilmot sick and faint. Every stroke left nine bleeding furrows on a back that had little flesh to cut. The fifth lash brought away a strip of skin and blood, that alighted on Wilmot's hand. To prevent himself from fainting, he plunged his hand into the bucket of salt water and sprinkled his face.

The boy-warder noticed the effect produced on Wilmot. He paused in his work, looked at him with a grin, and remarked in English—

“I can flog—eh?”

“You are a brute—worse than a Kafir,” Wilmot replied, burning with indignation and disgust.

It was a foolish speech—foolish, because, as an educated man, he should have known that the artistic temperament is always sensitive to praise or blame; and this Afrikaner was an artist in his special line,

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and expected appreciation. He not only did not get it from Wilmot, but had thrown at him instead the greatest insult that could be put upon his race. He had been compared to a Kafir, and by a Rooinek—a prisoner! The young German took in the situation, and drew Wilmot away.

“Go back to your room,” he said kindly.

Wilmot went, and the boy-warder looked after him, then returned to his work. The doctor stopped him after five more strokes: there was not an inch of flesh remaining that was not gashed and quivering.

An hour later the boy-warder entered No. 4, where Wilmot was lying on the bed, heart and body sick.

“Come this way, Kerel.”

There were other five men in the cell, but Wilmot knew without looking up that he was addressed. He followed the young savage to the store-room.

“Strip and put on those clothes,” came the order. Wilmot protested that he was exempt,—that he was going to pay his fine.

The warder went to the door and called to three officials, who came up.

“This Rooinek says he’ll see me damned before he strips,” said he.

The three men rushed at Wilmot, forced him against the wall, and began to tear his clothes from him. Wilmot made a struggle for it, and got in several scientific blows that caused his assailants to stand off. Before they could recover and renew the attack, the deputy-governor, attracted by the sounds of the



scuffle, looked in. He was a Hollander, and one of the few jail officials respected by the prisoners.

"Don't be a fool, Wilmot," he said kindly; "you'll do yourself no good."

Wilmot stated his case; the boy-warder stated his.

"Go back to your cell; never mind changing now."

Wilmot retired jubilant. He did not know that the friendly intervention was worse for him than the rough usage it had averted. The boy-warder was a true son of the soil, therefore had influence in high places which the deputy-governor had not. The private was often more powerful in the Transvaal than the captain.

Within twelve hours Wilmot had learned what it meant to irritate a jail official. The wrath of the Gang, when the story was known, was intense. The boy-warder had for long been an object of their solicitude, for he had so far escaped corruption, and, strong in his knowledge that he was the *protégé* of an influential member of the Government, had displayed an independence and fearlessness in his tyranny that was the despair of the older hands and the terror of the new. They marked their disapproval by ordering Wilmot to return to the gloomy cell that had been at first assigned to him, now occupied by a morose and brutal Italian who spoke no English or Dutch, and was as dirty as the elastic rules of the jail would allow. He was also addicted to pacing the cell half the night gesticulating and shouting. The doctor was reported to have declared the man insane, but not sufficiently dangerous to justify removal.

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"You're booked for the road party," said Steevens, when they met next morning in the yard. "You were a fool to quarrel with that young brute. He'll make your life a hell. Hurry up that fine-money, or you'll not need it."

Wilmot spent a miserable night. It was dark in the cell soon after six, and he had neither the light of the surreptitious lamp nor the cheerful companionship that made the evenings in No. 4 pass so agreeably. The horror of his wakefulness was intensified by the proximity of his cell to the quarters of the Kafirs. Some of the poor wretches who had been flogged that morning were separated from him only by a grating-pierced wall, and their piteous groans and outcries, as they writhed on their faces in agony, tortured him. He could believe what one of the white prisoners who had "passed the triangle" for insubordination had remarked: "The five minutes under the lash are paradise compared with the forty-eight hours that follow. The agony doesn't begin till your arms are cast loose; then you know why the recollection of a flogging will keep the pluckiest a cowed cur for the rest of his life."

Wilmot discovered next day that the author of the most heartrending groans and wails was Sixpence, the Zulu who had taken his fifteen lashes without a cry.

It was an anxious quarter of an hour he passed next morning while the road party was being mustered, and he saw them go out with a thrill of delight. It was not the labour he feared so much as the march through the streets where he might be recognised. Had he



but known he would have begged to be allowed to court the exposure he shrank from.

He remained in the gloomy cell and corridor for an hour or two to avoid the boy-warder; but the solitude and inaction at last impelled him to seek the warmth and sunshine of the yard. As he stood against a wall, he noticed a well-dressed young man looking hard at him. He was, apparently, an official of some kind, for he had been chatting familiarly with the deputy-governor, and walking about with the air of one having the freedom of the place. Presently he sauntered towards Wilmot, and gave him a cheery "Good morning."

"Not raised that fine yet?" he remarked.

"I'm expecting it every post," Wilmot answered.

"Easier to get in than out, eh? Friends inclined to forget you when once behind these walls."

"Mine won't," Wilmot answered, with some asperity.

"Hope not," was the laconic retort, uttered, Wilmot thought, with some meaning.

"Are you on the staff here?"

"No; got business here, that's all. Got a friend there." He jerked his head towards the quarters occupied by the Reform prisoners. He lit a pipe and placed his back against the wall, as if disposed to continue the conversation.

"Treat you well?"

Wilmot added cautiously that things might be worse.

"Then you're lucky. Wait till they get you on the roads, as they will if that fine doesn't turn up."

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Before Wilmot could reply to this disconcerting remark, the speaker walked quickly across the yard, took the arm of a warder, and disappeared through the main gateway.

A sickening sense of despair and abandonment settled on Wilmot. He had up till now felt only the vexation of postponement. He had invented fifty satisfactory reasons for the strange silence of Hartley, but hope and faith were killed by the parting remark of the stranger, for he seemed to speak as one having a knowledge he would not fully reveal.

The rest of the day became an extension of the gloom of the cell, and the night one that filled an eternity of blackness.

Eagerly next morning he watched for the orderly who brought round the few and infrequent letters for prisoners, but his name was not called. Then came the suspense attending the mustering of the road party, and the relief as they marched out without him.

Two maddening days passed in solitude, save for the night companionship of the demented Italian. Even the cheery Steevens came not near him. He had been put to his work in the women's quarter of the prison, and as willing skilled workmen were always indulgently treated in Pretoria jail, the mason found means of killing spare time away from the gloomy area to which Wilmot was restricted. The cautiousness of self-interest prevented any member of the Gang showing friendliness to a prisoner under the ban of a vindictive and influential warder, who ordered Wilmot to his cell every time he noticed



him in the yard. Fortunately the young brute was much away from the prison, being able to nominate himself for those light and agreeable duties that entailed day-long visits to town. Wilmot was thereby saved much persecution, but he felt keenly the injustice of the boycott. On the eighth day the young stranger, whom Wilmot learned was named Vollmer, appeared in the yard. He walked straight past him into the building, signing him to follow, and led the way to the gloomy cell. Shutting the door, he produced a small parcel of cigarettes, some newspapers, a novel, and a flask of whisky.

"I brought them for my friend over there," he said, as he signed to Wilmot to put them under the bed; "but it would be dangerous to run them through. The warders have a concession for smuggling, and won't have any opposition."

There was a breezy spontaneous good-nature about young Vollmer that was particularly comforting to the lonely friendless prisoner, and his thanks were heartfelt, for he had been reduced to that condition of hopeless helplessness when sympathy is above rubies. It was an hour when the warders, having performed their routine duties, were least obtrusive. So Wilmot enjoyed the cigarette and whisky with the added zest that comes with the unexpected and forbidden luxury.

He lost no time in opening up the subject that was wearing him,—the non-receipt of a letter from Hartley.

Vollmer, sitting on the bed, made no reply for a

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space, but carefully rolled a cigarette. Then with significant deliberation, and without looking up, he asked—

“Is there any reason why your friends should keep you here?”

“What on earth puts that idea into your head?”

Wilmot made his reply boldly, but the question had filled him with vague apprehension.

Vollmer was a long time rolling the cigarette. He answered with lackadaisical slowness—

“Well, you see, I’m more or less in a position to hear things, and I had an idea there might be more in your case than appears. I happened to be in court that morning, and I didn’t like the look of the case. That story of the detective shadowing you as an illicit liquor hand was too thin. It’s my opinion you are being kept out of the way for some reason. It’s an old dodge here. Just turn over in your mind any little thing you may have said or done—for instance, any bit of dangerous information you may have got hold of that would be awkward for other people. It looks to me very much like a put-up job, and what you’ve got to find out is who would be most benefited by your being out of the way.”

Wilmot stood speechless. This man was putting into words the vague suspicions and fears that forced themselves through the weak spots in the wall of reason which he had built on his theories to account for Hartley’s non-intervention. It was a minute before he could frame a sentence to express his feelings.



"What do you know? Do you really believe what you suggest?"

Vollmer flicked the ash from his cigarette and cleared his throat before answering. His hesitating deliberation maddened Wilmot.

"Speak out!" he ejaculated.

"Well, I can't say I *know*; but I suspect a good deal." He rose and moved to the door. "I must go now; but I'll keep my eyes and ears open outside, and let you know what I pick up. I shall be here again to-morrow. Good-bye. Keep your heart up, and think of what I've said."

Wilmot needed no prompting to think on what had been said, or rather suggested. Who would be benefited by his being out of the way? The obvious answer was Hartley and, indirectly, old Adam; but to suspect the former meant the wrecking of the absolute and pleasant faith with which that lovable though rugged fellow had inspired him, and the thought was bitter. There are few more poignant pains than those which come with the awakening knowledge that a genuine devotion and confidence have been misplaced and spurned, for to the sense of wrong suffered is added the humiliation of having proved so credulous and poor a judge of character.

Wilmot had ample time for tasting the bitterness of the draught. Vollmer did not visit the jail next day, neither was the monotonous loafing interfered with by the warders. When the first rush of indignant anger had worn itself out by its intensity, Wilmot began to reason, and stopped short at one

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impassable boulder. If Hartley had a hand in this, how could he, how dared he, make the authorities parties to his action? Surely they were the least likely to be sought in alliance.

Two days later Vollmer again entered the cell. He brought a few luxuries, and talked gaily and genially of anything but the one subject that absorbed his listener, who could stand the suspense no longer, and boldly asked Vollmer if he had learned anything.

"Yes and no," he answered, with the old provoking dubiety. "It may be only rumour, but I have heard quite indirectly, and in a patchwork sort of way, something to the effect that you found out where some guns were hidden; that some other parties used your knowledge, then worked this plant on you, to get you out of the way of sharing the reward."

"Are they selling the secret to the Government?" Wilmot almost shouted, completely thrown off his guard.

"Yes; and they are holding out for a bigger reward than the Government will pay. In the end they will get their price. It's rough on you, for I hear they would have known nothing of it but for you. I know what I would do if I were in your place."

He paused and examined his cigarette.

"What?" Wilmot was feverish with indignation and anxiety.

"What any man would do. Get in first, collar the reward, and spoil their dirty game."



CHAPTER X.

THE RESCUE OF ANDROMEDA.

HARTLEY rejoiced greatly, though soberly, on the receipt of Wilmot's telegram, and two days later went to the Resurgam, expecting to find him. When two more days passed without result he logically concluded that Wilmot was celebrating their joint good fortune in the foolish, familiar way. He would have done the same himself, so could not, and did not, grumble; but when a fortnight failed to bring the prodigal, Hartley expressed himself forcibly to Adam on the absurdity of carrying celebrations to extremes, and at the same time marvelled that so protracted a holiday in the most expensive town in South Africa could be conducted on the limited reserve of cash at Wilmot's command. Adam was principally concerned over the extra duty entailed on him by the long absence of his assistant; though, when the Town Secretary visited the mine and inquired for the store-keeper, Adam loyally and satisfactorily explained his absence. He also communicated to Hartley his suspicions regarding the mysterious applicants for work.

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The resourceful Yorkshireman promptly took steps to anticipate a police search by hiding the gun and gear. This was effected by storing it with Macnab, the Krugersdorp auctioneer, whose pronounced Boer sympathies were sufficient to divert any suspicion.

A week later Hartley went to Pretoria in search of the missing partner. Working on the reasonable hypothesis of a prolonged celebration, he made the round of the principal bars, and prosecuted inquiries with the tact begotten of experience and a delicate aversion to imply that the object of his quest was vulgarly "on a drunk." He had resolutely started on his tour of exploration wearing the conscience-pricking tight collar; but the peculiar nature of his mission often compelled him to linger at a bar until the attendant could be drawn into a communicative humour. Pretoria was rife with suspicion, and public servants like barmen saw a spy in every inquiring stranger, and kept a guard on their tongues, which could only be relaxed by considerable skill and generosity in the application of liquid emollient.

When, towards the end of a tiring and fruitless day, a barman suggested a call of inquiry at the police-station, Hartley was scarcely in the condition to command the respectful consideration of a Pretorian policeman, and his interrogatories, though presented in something approaching the official language, only elicited a denial of all knowledge of the person sought, a blank refusal to look up records, and advice to the inquirer to get straight to bed before he was accommodated on the spot.



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Next day Hartley remembered the name of the engineer Bolton, and found him; but he could give no information. He had not seen Wilmot after the evening they spent together, nor did he know the name of the hotel at which the young man had put up.

Hartley found the hostelry by dint of patience; but the only evidence of his friend was an unpaid account, and a Gladstone bag which the proprietor refused to hand over to any one but the man who had left it. A few more places and persons were visited without result, then Hartley returned to Johannesburg.

Had he thought of searching the files of the Pretoria newspapers he might have come upon a three-lined paragraph in the police reports setting forth that "a European, giving the name of G. Will. Malt, was sentenced to a fine of £75 or three months for supplying liquor to a native." The propensity of Pretorian compositors to take liberties with proper names was sometimes, especially in the police reports, a merciful and saving grace. In this case it was a calamity.

Hartley spent a day in exploring possible hiding-places in Johannesburg, but learned nothing except a confirmation of the proverb, "Out of sight out of mind." Wilmot's acquaintances not having seen him for many weeks, had almost forgotten him, though one or two gave Hartley some unnecessary trouble by declaring they had seen the missing man "the other day."

Hartley went on to the Resurgam to consult Adam

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as to the probability of Wilmot having gone on to de Villiers' place. The Yorkshireman was prone to argue from the personal standpoint. He knew that he had frequently finished up a spree by an abrupt and impolitic call upon the lady who happened to occupy his attention at the time: it took the form of a pilgrimage of penitence. Wilmot's attentions to Miss van Rooyen had been so pronounced, and his after comments such as to suggest that the girl had made some impression upon him. It was, therefore, in Hartley's opinion, a most reasonable assumption that he had gone on to Rietspruit. If any further argument were needed it was supplied by the vague restless desire he felt to see and talk with Clarie. He hired a horse at Krugersdorp and rode out.

Whether that much-debated sympathetic force which students of matters psychic call telepathic was operating upon the mind of Hartley can only be guessed. Certain it is that if such affinity exists, the conditions were in favour of its development, for while Hartley was riding Clarie was with him in spirit, as she had been during most of her waking hours since his last visit.

Unknown to him, that pleasant interchange of confidences had been the cause of one of the most violent disturbances of the never too placid atmosphere at Rietspruit that had agitated her soul. The immediate provoking causes were her step-mother, her sister Hendrika, and Johannes Smeer. To herself, Clarie confessed that much of the trouble had been brought about by her own indiscretion. Presuming upon the



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armistice between herself and Smeer, she had treated her importunate and tactless wooer with something approaching severity, pointedly resenting his cumbersome endearments, and forbidding him to discuss the subject of marriage until he had carried out his part of the contract made with Hartley. Smeer was incapable of appreciating the fact that he had been put upon parole to cease hostilities, and having had time to pass the matter through his muddy brain, he could see only an unwarranted interference on the part of the Rooinek, who, doubtless, had his own ends in view. Besides, had he not agreed to earn money by taking service with Hartley? He put this view of the matter to his cousin, Mrs de Villiers. She not only supported his interpretation, but urged a renewal of the attack, and did a little outpost skirmishing by upbraiding Clarie and coarsely accusing her of brazenly setting her cap at the drunken Rooinek.

It was at this point Hendrika took a hand. She had been unmistakably smitten and prepossessed by Wilmot's graceful flatteries and attentions. He was a Rooinek, therefore included in her mother's denunciation of Hartley. Hendrika let her tongue go and asserted herself. Her mother retorted by removing any doubt as to whether Wilmot was included by describing him as a nincompoop, and several other things for which the Taal has a copious descriptive vocabulary. Then began a tornado, engineered by the spoiled pet of both parents and tyrant of the household. The veneer of two years' polish at school was torn off in a sentence, and she stood in the un-

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lovely nakedness of a vituperative, vixenish Boer maiden.

Clarie retreated from the storm to her room, Mrs de Villiers cowered in the kitchen, and Smeer hastily saddled up and rode back to his farm, for with feminine unreason Hendrika struck blindly at all within reach of her tongue, making Clarie the special objective, "because she began it"; Smeer, because he was an old fool; her mother, because she hated her pet daughter; and her father, because he would not interfere, but smoked placidly on the stoep.

For days the feud raged, and if at times it showed signs of dying from want of fuel, Mrs de Villiers fanned the embers by a sneering or tearful allusion to the misery caused by the possession of daughters who were so lost to all sense of what was due to their family as to openly and unblushingly encourage Rooinek admirers. Old Piet was secretly angry with Clarie, but the expression of his feelings would have necessitated an expenditure of energy his indolent nature was not equal to, so he remained discreetly silent.

Clarie, forced into isolation, gave way to the yearning for sympathy that is the outcome of a sense of loneliness, and her thoughts naturally flew to the man who, all unconsciously, was the cause of her suffering. On the sympathy and open support of the young Predikant she knew she could not count. Among the fetishes of his cult which had survived the cleansing fire of his more liberal thought and education was the sacredness of racial exclusiveness.



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Clarie knew well which side he would champion, and when a few days later he arrived, specially retained by Smeer to urge the moral and religious side of his cause, she, for the first time, received him without pleasure.

His opening remark drove her behind a breastwork of dogged self-defence and hostility.

"Clarie," said he, holding her hand, and speaking with an impressiveness that seemed forced and artificial in view of their former intimate relationship, "what does Timothy say?—'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. For I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.'"

It was Scriptural, if not precisely apposite.

"Learn in silence!" she returned bitterly. "Isn't my life one dreary silence and subjection?"

And then the incongruity of the injunction aroused her sense of humour.

"I wish you would convert Mrs de Villiers to that doctrine," she said.

Mr Stegmann sat down in the cool shady sitting-room without answering. He was in an oracular and Predikantal mood, an attitude he had long ceased to affect in the presence of Clarie.

"Johannes Smeer has been talking to you," she said.

The Predikant nodded, and there was one of those long pauses which punctuate Afrikaner converse without embarrassing it.

"He has told me all, and, Clarie, though I cannot

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regard him as a fitting mate for you, yet I prefer it to the other alternative."

"What is that? Staying here to learn silence and subjection?"

The flippant tone annoyed the young man. He answered severely—

"Better that than to sow dissension among your people."

"You have always given me credit for avoiding it. Was it only said to flatter me? Did you not believe what you were saying?"

Mr Stegmann looked angry. Flattery was his pet aversion, against which he inveighed eloquently.

"It is you who are saying what you do not believe. You are pretending that you have no intention of marrying that Englishman." He spoke very severely.

"You are the first who has suggested it. If that is the matter on which silence is to be kept, it is you who have broken it,—you and the stupid person who put the idea into your head."

"But he has a right to object."

"*He?* Then Johannes Smeer *has* been fooling you. If he told you the truth, he told you that I had promised to consider what he had to say on certain conditions. But, Mr Stegmann, why do you try to stir up dissension and make my lot harder than it is? Is that proper work for a Predikant, and a friend?"

Mr Stegmann looked hard at Clarie, as a school-master might at a pupil who had rebuked him. He was not used to being argued with by members of



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his Kerk. The opposition startled and disconcerted him. When Hartley got worsted in a discussion he knocked his opponent down. A Predikant could not well do that, so he fell back on the violence of Scriptural denunciation of the proud and stiff-necked, and lectured Clarie on her duty to her people.

"Which means," interposed Clarie, "that I must be a passive subject in the hands of Mrs de Villiers and her cousin."

Mr Stegmann at first said no, emphatically no, then he qualified by explaining that what he meant was that a Boer woman committed a grievous wrong when she left her own people to marry an alien. He ingeniously inverted several passages from the Old Testament to meet the case. But Clarie refused to be drawn into an argument based on false premisses.

"Would it not be better to keep your objections until I have said I am going to marry an Englishman or any one else?"

"But, Clarie, can you say with a white heart that you have no such intention?"

"Why should you believe Johannes rather than me?"

"I do not," he replied weakly.

"Then you do believe me; so the matter is settled." And Clarie left the discomfited young Predikant to finish his sermon on stiff-necked women to Mrs de Villiers.

But the matter was not settled. A few days later Mr Stegmann came again, apparently refreshed by

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his client, for he reopened the subject *de novo*. "Mr Stegmann," said Clarie, firmly, "I do not wish to hurt your feelings, for I believe you are doing what you think to be your duty as Predikant. But let me tell you that if I have thought of marrying the man you are referring to, it is because you have put the idea into my head. You have forced me to think of a man as a husband who is only a friend. Mr Hartley has never spoken to me of marriage, and until now I have never thought of him in that relation. He is only a friend whose company I have liked because he is so different to the men I have to endure in this dreadful life. Do believe me when I tell you that all I want is to be left in peace to look after my young sisters and brothers, and try to make their lives a little brighter than mine was before I went to school. I am no longer a girl, Mr Stegmann, and marriage is not the one thing in my mind; so please don't make things harder than they are by helping to force me on to a man I can never respect or like."

Clarie spoke with intense feeling, and when she had finished she was trembling.

Mr Stegmann made no attempt to answer her: he felt that this was her ultimatum, and that he must accept it; but he was vexed and humiliated, for it was his first rebuff. He was young, consequently a rigorous stickler for the old established right of the Predikant to pose as guide, philosopher, and friend in the domestic affairs of members of his church, particularly when they involved a principle on which



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he felt strongly. At that very time a series of strong philippics were issuing from the pulpits of both churches, directed against the growing tendency on the part of Afrikander maidens to allow themselves to be unequally yoked with aliens. The young Predikant had joined in the solemn protest, and had weakly re-echoed it from his own pulpit. Further, this was the first time his sacerdotal rights had been challenged; and that the challenger should be a woman over whom he believed he exercised considerable intellectual and moral influence, pained and disappointed him keenly.

He sat silent for a minute or two, then solemnly suggested that the matter had reached the stage when prayer alone was fitting. Clarie assented; she felt some concession was due, for the young man was so obviously suffering. Womanlike, she almost repented her victory the moment it was assured. She could not forget that, in spite of his narrowness, Mr Stegmann had been a valued friend. So she knelt at the table while the young man prayed for and at her at fervent length and with tearful earnestness, appealing so thoroughly to the emotional in her nature that he left her subdued and contrite, and seriously debating whether, after all, she did not deserve the severe things he had said of her egotistical contumacy.

But with the thought of Hartley came a reaction. Gradually there stole over her a sense of the injustice of the whole thing. Was it not strange that the person who, of all others, should sympathise and even applaud the attitude she had taken with regard

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to Hartley should be the most ardent in his condemnation? Her conscience became easier as she reviewed the circumstances of her association with the man who seemed fated to play an important part in her otherwise eventless life. Hartley was vaguely yet ineradicably connected with Miss Ross; he was the link that united the present with her happy companionship with the woman who had shaped her life, for he was the first person who had proved responsive to her timorous effort to exercise that humanising sympathy which it had been the mission of Miss Ross to inculcate in all who came under her softening influence.

At the time Clarie came to the farm from school, Hartley was engaged in prospecting a few miles away. He had got involved in squabbles with the Boer neighbours that had closed their doors to him, and thrown him upon the companionship and solace of the bottle. Whatever its other vices, drunkenness is not a besetting sin of Boerdom, and the flagrant example of Hartley provided a text for the denunciation of Rooineks by the pharisaical old Predikant whom Mr Stegmann had succeeded, and the older farmers of the district. Clarie's contact with Englishers of the better class in Bloemfontein had predisposed her to a larger degree of catholicity than was tolerated in her narrow circle, and she boldly resented the implication that Hartley was a type. Finding herself the champion of an unpopular cause, she missed no argument for justifying her position, and, before she fully realised it, had succeeded in partly



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weaning the prospector from excuse for his vice by making him welcome at the farm. After a few months of domesticity he had, with characteristic outspokenness, assured Clarie that her efforts had prevented him from many an act of foolish indulgence, and largely restrained his craving for stimulant. Her triumph gratified her vanity and encouraged her to make it more manifest. Thus was laid the foundation of mutual confidence and regard that was deeper and stronger than either perhaps realised. Now the united efforts of the family to separate them produced the usual effect of opposition in such cases,—she clung to Hartley as much for the vindication of her own judgment as for the genuine liking he had inspired.

Apart from the religious objections urged by the Predikant, he had said but one thing that had impressed her. Like most inexperienced dialecticians, he became involved and discursive as he warmed to his subject, and introduced arguments and parallels whose application was not very clear. While endeavouring to enforce his doctrine of racial exclusiveness, he incidentally enlarged on the suffering that came from educating children beyond their sphere, citing several cases of Boer girls who had been educated to the point of repudiating their simple and ignorant parents. The illustration Clarie knew to be far-fetched, and precedents rare and exceptional; but when pressed for a weapon a debater so unskilled as young Mr Stegmann seized on anything that looked like one. The same objection had been used by Mrs de Villiers against the education of Clarie's young

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sisters. Her views on the subject were those of the old Boer school,—that a girl's duty consisted in becoming, as soon as possible, the wife of a Boer and the patient mother of as many children as Providence thought fit. Though secretly proud of the superior education of her own daughter,—who had been sent to school because of her opposition to her prospective step-father,—Mrs de Villiers fully realised that this superiority did not enhance the girl's value in the marriage market, since it scared and repelled the men who might otherwise have chosen her. She therefore carried out her resolve that the other children should not earn the same disability, by refusing to permit Clarie to instruct them with her own sisters.

The Predikant had never before expressed to Clarie his agreement with the narrow views of Mrs de Villiers on the education question, and his present attitude surprised and disappointed her.

But the thing that had made the most lasting impression was a casual illustration he had employed. He was expatiating on the bitterness of isolation that is the natural result of intellectual separateness from one's fellows.

"It is like christianising a Kafir," he said; "you make him unfit to remain with his heathen people, but not fit to be received by Christian whites."

It was a telling shot, for that very household supplied a case in point. Golosh, the despised and ill-used Kafir drudge, was the object-lesson. Educated at one of the native mission colleges of Cape Colony, he had for ten weary years been reaping the harvest sown by



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those who, with the kindest of intentions, had condemned him to a life of dreary separateness, by developing and fostering in him aspirations and appetites that the laws and social observances of the country conspired to suppress. From the time he left the college, Golosh had been a lonely outcast, regarded with contempt and mistrust by the natives whose ways were foreign to him, scouted and sneered at by the whites, to whom the christianised native is neither fish, flesh, nor fowl. He had drifted over South Africa till cast up, stranded, at Hartley's camp on Rietspruit. The Yorkshireman had all a colonial's dislike for an educated Kafir; but being short of labour, and finding Golosh's knowledge of English compensated for his own unfamiliarity with the native languages, he sacrificed prejudice to expediency by employing him. When the work was finished Golosh was taken on at the farm, mainly at the instigation of Clarie, who felt something like pity for the forlorn, well-behaved outcast, though she deprecated the mistaken philanthropy that had produced a pariah. As a Boer woman, impregnated with the race prejudice of generations, she had all that sense of white supremacy which had heretofore prevented her regarding a Kafir as anything more than an accessory to the work of the farm, as something less valuable than a horse or ox, for while one cost and represented money, it demanded a certain amount of thought and care; but a Kafir could be kicked out at any moment with no greater loss than a little temporary inconvenience, probably with actual profit, for a Kafir discharged for a fault

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was by Boer ethics deemed to have forfeited any pay that might be due to him, a contingency most prudent farmers provided for by keeping Kafir wages well in arrear.

Since her return to the farm, and her realisation of how far she stood apart from her own people, Clarie had at times found herself comparing her lot with that of Golosh, and he stood in her mind for a symbol of her own place in life. When, therefore, the same simile was employed by the Predikant, the sense of its force and truth overwhelmed her, and she writhed under the humiliation of the comparison as only a woman of her instincts could. That she should be unintentionally preparing her sisters for a fate like her own occurred to her in a stronger light than she had before viewed it, and the impulse to act upon Hartley's advice by abandoning her mission filled her mind as an unpleasant duty to be faced without regard to personal feeling.

Her harassed mind was grappling with this many-sided problem as she strolled this afternoon with Lisbeth and one of the little brothers. She had wandered much farther than usual, along the road towards Krugersdorp, and was thinking of returning when the big form of Hartley on a tripping horse came over the rise.

In a moment pleasure and regret were striving for mastery in her mind. She was satisfied that this perfectly accidental *rencontre* would be cited by the suspicious step-mother as proof of an understanding between Hartley and herself, or why should she have



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chosen this rugged piece of road for her afternoon's stroll when there were a dozen more agreeable walking grounds? The fact that it was the road used by Johannes Smeer would not weigh with Mrs de Villiers.

"A lucky meeting. I wanted to get you alone," said Hartley as he dismounted.

"Unlucky, rather."

Clarie uttered the words on the impulse of her feelings.

Hartley asked why; but the proper reply and her usual readiness in an awkward position failed her, and she stammered an attempt to fence an explanation.

Hartley knew no such reticence.

"I suppose Smeer will say you came to meet me by appointment."

"Don't talk of it, please, Dick; I am sick of the thing. When can you take him away? I shall go mad if he comes much oftener."

Hartley flamed up, and was beginning to put into vigorous English the feeling that consumed him regarding the intrusive Boer. Clarie stopped him.

"You must not take my part,—it will only make it harder for me;" and sending the children on ahead, she gave Hartley an outline sketch of the position at home, carefully making him understand that it was her treatment of Smeer that had provoked the hostility, and not the supposed rivalry of the Englishman.

Hartley listened impatiently to the narration, then, with the brusque promptitude that was equally his strength and his weakness, made up his mind.

"I'll take Johannes Smeer to Johannesburg," said

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he; "you shall have no more trouble from that brute. I'll agree to take his waggon."

The gratitude Clarie felt she dared not express, except in cautious, commonplace thanks.

When they reached the farm Hartley went straight to old Piet, and told him he could not take his waggon, as he had made better terms with Smeer. The old man made no objection, merely remarking, what was the truth, that Hartley had made a bad bargain, as Smeer's oxen and waggon were not equal to a journey such as the one proposed.

Hartley rode over to Smeer's farm, six miles distant, and clenched the bargain, stipulating that the man should come at once to Johannesburg, where Hartley would fix up preliminaries and pay all expenses. Having no vrouw to discuss business with, and a farm that could safely be left to the care of the couple of Kafirs who had charge of the few oxen that constituted Smeer's sole asset, in addition to the waggon-span, he had within an hour conquered his natural aversion to haste and effort, assisted probably by the ten sovereigns Hartley paid him on account.

They rode back to Rietspruit to spend the evening preparatory to an early departure next day.

As Johannes had to give Mrs de Villiers a full account of the circumstances of his supplanting her husband, he was detained in the kitchen for the greater part of the evening, affording Clarie and Hartley the luxury of an uninterrupted enjoyment of each other's company.

Clarie possessed very much of the curiosity and



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love of detail of the Boer woman, which the influence of the school had failed to eradicate; therefore Hartley's hatred of duplicity rendered the task of keeping vital matters from the probe of her questioning both difficult and irksome. He said nothing of the unaccountable absence of Wilmot, and contrived to satisfy Clarie as to how Smeer was to be occupied and detained in Johannesburg pending the trek. He, of course, did not hint that the charge he had undertaken would strain his resources of cash and diplomacy. His genial Rand-bred optimism glazed such objections as presented themselves, and the gratitude and relief that showed in Clarie's face amply atoned for any prospective hardships that would be the price of the task he had mapped for himself.

He had some difficulty next morning to persuade Smeer that it was unnecessary for him to take the supply of biltong and biscuit the old man had provided for his support and sustenance in Johannesburg; it was harder still to induce him to substitute for it a change of clothing. He succeeded in both, eventually; Piet's wardrobe supplying the raiment which Smeer insisted was altogether superfluous, and would be returned unused. After a leave-taking that suggested a journey to the uttermost ends of the earth, so far as Smeer was concerned, the pair left the farm.

Hartley made a call at the Resurgam, and found Adam preternaturally serious.

"Who's the Boer?" he demanded suspiciously.

Hartley explained, except his true reasons for bringing him.

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"Well, the sooner you get off the better. I've had another fellow here asking about you, and saying he knew Wilmot, but I sent him off with a flea in his ear. I'm certain the Government suspect something, but dare not search the property, because they have been sold already so many times. There's another thing. The Town Secretary has been down wanting to see Wilmot. I had to sear my conscience and practise awful duplicity to make things straight. I said Wilmot was keen on machinery, and had gone to Johannesburg to inspect a new hauling gear. It was the closest I could sail to wind'ard o' truth."

Hartley announced his intention of making a thorough search in Johannesburg as soon as he had bestowed Smeer somewhere out of danger and extravagance, and left for Krugersdorp.

He had not been five minutes in his favourite bar before he was conscious that a red-headed man was signalling him to step into the billiard-room. He took the hint, and the man cautiously inquired—

"Are you Dick Hartley? The barman told me you are."

"What if I am?" Dick looked the man up and down thoroughly before replying.

"Is this for you?" The man handed him a dirty scrap of paper, apparently the blank page from a printed book. On it was scribbled, "Steevens, from G. W. O.K."

Hartley recognised the writing.

"Have a drink?" It was the Rand formula for opening up negotiations.



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"What do you know?" In a few words Steevens executed the commission he had undertaken to carry out. He had been released on payment of his fine, and after celebrating it by a prolonged debauch, had visited Hartley's camp on the East Rand, and traced him to the Resurgam, where a suspicious old Scottie talked about having him run in for trespass.

"I was off by the next train," he said; "so if I had missed you it would have been his fault."

Hartley attempted an excuse for Adam, but Steevens interrupted—

"Oh, yes; I guessed. He thought I was a detective. I can see as far through a brick wall as most people. I know that Wilmot knows something, but it's no business of mine what game you have on. I know the Government are trying to find out, and they are doing their best to squeeze it out of him. If you'll be advised by me, you won't let him remain there another day. They're making it Hell for him,—trying to make him believe that his pals have sold him. I don't know whether they have, but it looks queer."

Hartley's wrath rose at the suggestion, but he did not let it master his tongue. He explained that his silence was the result of ignorance as to Wilmot's whereabouts: that he had not received the letter said to have been written, and gave the history of his search.

"I can see you're straight," said Steevens at the end of the narration. "Now we come to bed-rock. Can you raise the seventy-five?"

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Hartley thought a bit, then said it would be a matter of a day or two.

"I've no blunt myself,—had to borrow a fiver to get down here, besides a tenner for my fine; but I've got a good job to go to, and if it's any use, my name will stand for a tenner at Bob Critchett's bar."

There was just time to ride back to the mine and interview Adam. The old man received the news with equanimity, as if not in the least surprised. He was sorry he could not contribute to the relief fund, but he knew that Wilmot had fifteen sovereigns in his bag.

Hartley made a rapid investigation, and discovered the money which, unknown to him, he had been authorised to receive. He gave Adam as much abuse for his meanness as he could crowd into the few minutes at his disposal, and got to the station in time for the train. Steevens accompanied him, and on the journey gave a long account of the sufferings of Wilmot, which worked Hartley into a fever of indignation, and stimulated him to the origination of plans.



CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH.

As Hartley passed through the streets of Johannesburg accompanied by Johannes Smeer, he became aware that both of them were receiving much more attention from the passers-by than circumstances seemed to justify. People turned to look at the shaggy old Boer, and several young men of the lately arrived type actually paused to stare at the old man with rude but genuine curiosity.

Hartley ran his eye critically over his companion, but saw nothing to excite comment, except that he was more shaggy and shabby, and perhaps a shade dirtier, than the up-country Boer who was to be met on the early morning market. The small haversack slung over his shoulder gave him a trifle of the air of the Boer with whom the recent Raid had made stay-at-home Johannesburgers slightly familiar for a few days; but the old man's demeanour should not have attracted attention.

Although this was the first town larger than a veld dorp that he had seen, he slouched along with that lack-lustre look in the eye, and utter absence of interest

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in his novel surroundings, that marks the difference between the South African Boer and the rustic of other countries, whose wonder and gaucheries on his first visit to congested civilisation have formed the text for much merriment. With his veld-born instinct he refused to walk by the side of his companion, but followed behind, as he would if walking a veld track, though, as he afterwards confided to Hartley, he kept a sharp eye open for the thieves and murderers who, according to a famous Krugerian dictum, formed the bulk of the population of the Rand. How he would recognise them among the few respectable passers-by he did not explain.

This deeply rooted faith in the Presidential estimate of Johannesburg made very difficult the task of securing an abiding-place for Smeer. He glanced suspiciously round the entrance-hall of the several boarding-houses to which Hartley introduced him, and within a few seconds expressed his opinion of them by slipping furtively out, leaving Hartley to break off negotiations with the landlord as gracefully as he could. When the fourth proprietor so treated showed fight, and demanded compensation for loss of time, Hartley received an inspiration. He bundled the old man into a cab, and drove to that portion of the town nicknamed Veldschoendorp, from the fact that its inhabitants were mainly poor Afrikaners—wearers of the veld-shoe,—the flotsam and jetsam of the veld, who had been attracted to the town to find the golden city more barren than the rocks that gave it its name. There Smeer soon found congenial com-



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pany, and arranged to share with a Boer and his family of eleven persons the two ten-by-ten mud-rooms that formed their home. The sum to be paid for his board and lodging was just five shillings less than the tariff of the decent boarding-house he had rejected.

When Hartley alighted from the cab in Commissioner Street he stood on the edge of the pavement for a few minutes to glance at what he called the surface indications, for he was feeling a sense of alienism. The curiosity excited by the passage of old Smeer through the streets brought home to him the fact that a new generation was fast arising on the Rand to whom the sight of one of its original denizens was a thing of strangeness. The carefully dressed men who brushed past him in the excited haste of up-to-date business methods were utterly foreign to the loosely clad happy-go-lucky saunterers on the road to fortune who were the pioneers of the Gold Reef City. He looked in vain for a man in shirt-sleeves, but saw instead ladylike and elegant women walking or driving, whose appearance only a few years before would have caused more staring and curiosity than Johannes Smeer. Just opposite where Hartley was standing was the modern representative of a once famous canteen, where he had seen hundreds squandered over the counter in a single night's debauch, and prices paid for choice brands of liquor or cigars that no man dared quote in Johannesburg to-day, except at risk of imputations on his veracity. As he stared at the gaily decorated and decorously conducted saloon, where quiet men drank sixpenny drinks and even

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cups of tea, he noticed a well-known millionaire walk quietly into the bar. Hartley knew him as a survival of the old *régime*, when the bar was the only club, and Doornfontein palaces existed only among the may-be's of the optimist. Like most of his class, Hertz was a solitary man when free from his following of spongers and sycophants, suspecting every man who accosted him of covert designs on his purse or influence. But he had been unable to throw off entirely the associations of his early days in the Camp—as old stagers even now call Johannesburg—and by way of concession to his only sentiment, made a practice of having four separate tots of sixpenny whisky a-day. He swallowed them quickly, almost furtively, and, distributing a few nods among old-time acquaintances, hurried back to his palatial offices, repeating to the pompous hall-porter the familiar apology, whose transparency deceived no one within ear-shot, "Been across to the Exchange"; to which the porter as regularly answered, "Exchange, yessir; not in to nobody, sir?"

As Hartley watched Hertz, he awoke from the reverie into which he had been plunged by this sudden, almost startling, realisation of changed conditions. He remembered that he had come into the street to raise somehow £150, which careful calculation on the journey up had shown to be the least sum on which he could put things in train for the expedition that was once and for all to be the finishing stroke of his years of strenuous toil and hope deferred. He had had many a business deal with the German



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millionaire in the days when millionaires were rare, and this the farthest off of them all. He would borrow from him. Next minute he was in the hall.

"Have you an appointment?" asked the porter.

"No; tell him Dick Hartley wants to see him for five minutes."

"No use, sir. He only sees strangers by appointment. Better see Mr Jones." He named a subordinate unknown to Hartley, who repudiated knowledge of him, insisted that he was no stranger, and demanded that his message should be taken in.

The porter was one of the new, well-disciplined school, the outer end of the pipe through which humans were filtered into the presence of latter-day gold magnates, through meshes formed of assistant secretaries, secretaries, confidential clerks, and managers of departments. Hartley had heard of and seen from a distance these new-fashioned methods of systematising business in Johannesburg, but had hitherto no personal experience of them. He had been used to walk straight and unannounced into the office of any man he wished to see, but preferred waylaying him in the street or bar. This affectation of superiority and unapproachable exclusiveness roused the democratic in his nature. Pushing the porter aside, he walked quickly to the end of the passage and tried to open the door behind which Hertz had disappeared. The porter hurried up and seized him by the arm.

"That is private, sir; you can't go in."

Two or three clerks peeped out of adjacent rooms

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and looked on in amaze at this scandalous attempt to beard the head of a great house in his private den. Some one mentioned the police, and in another minute there might have been good cause for calling them, for Hartley's temper was rising fast, and declaration of war, couched in the expressive phraseology of the old camp days, was on his tongue, when the private door opened, and there stood between him and his objective point a man as big as himself, whom he at once recognised as a well-known mining engineer.

"Hullo, Hartley! what's up? Come and have a drink," and he led the offended giant outside and over to the nearest bar, listening laughingly to his indignant denunciation of those who had thwarted his mission.

When Hartley had cooled down—always a rapid process—he listened to and accepted the advice of the engineer,—to defer raiding Hertz and dragging him out, as was his declared intention.

"He will be over here in an hour; wait for him, and catch him then."

"These new-fangled ways make me feel wicked," Hartley answered grumpily. "I'm not used to 'em. Out in the veld most of the time, don't get the hang of 'em. Used to people sending for me if they want me, not going cap in hand to them."

"Times have changed," the engineer suggested soothingly. "Business has grown since the early days. If a man like Hertz sat with his door open and bottle on the desk, as he did in the old time, he'd get through more whisky than work. Look at





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the crowd waiting there now. I had to wait nearly an hour, and I had an appointment."

The engineer was a man of importance in the mining world, so the admission carried weight.

"I only want a matter of a hundred and fifty," Hartley remarked in a tone of expostulation.

"Green is the best man to see about accounts. He's very prompt. Go to him now; I know he's not engaged."

"It's not an account. I want a loan."

The engineer whistled, finished his whisky, and said "Good morning."

"Hurry up!" came the voice of Steevens, small but distinct.

Hartley, having no tight collar on, took the reminder as a hint to get on with his drinking, by way of stimulating the energy that the rebuff had slightly damped. There were several obviously thirsty and impecunious loafers in the bar, who, hearing Hartley's order to the barmaid, added theirs to it. He utilised their friendliness to inquire about certain people he had lost sight of through his long and frequent absence from town, and the information acquired put him on the track of an old acquaintance, from whom he believed he could obtain the help he required. The thought of Wilmot being coerced into parting with their secret worried him, and forbade his wasting an hour in waiting for the problematical Hertz.

He found his man in his office. He said he was delighted to meet Hartley, and looked it until the matter of a loan was broached; then his *bonhomie*

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froze, and the jovial friend became the severely business-like man. He was extremely sorry to have to say nay, but this Jameson Raid had practically ruined his prospects, and he could see nothing but bankruptcy before him.

Within the next two hours Hartley had interviewed half a dozen men, who, oddly enough, had all lost or missed fortunes through that same Raid. One or two were frankly brutal enough to refuse assistance without excuse or apology, but others were heart-broken at the necessity which compelled denial. If he had only called a few days earlier——

He did not stay to hear what would have been the result. He began to realise that times really had changed, and he with them. He was plainly not the Hartley of three or four years ago, who could safely rely upon borrowing anything up to two or three hundreds if pushed into a corner, and on no better security than his word or, at most, an I. O. U. scribbled on the back of an envelope. He accepted the Raid as a partial explanation, but refused to recognise that he was beginning to pay the price of successive failures, and that he was discredited. His castles had proved hovels so often that no one who knew him believed in his future. "Poor old Hartley is going under." "Whisky is doing its great work." "Great pity. He ought to have been a wealthy man settled down at home to-day," were some of the comments made behind his back when the word went round that Dick Hartley was in town "trying to raise a bit."



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For the first time in his variegated career on the Fields Hartley began to take his ill-luck seriously. He had many a time been worried by want of immediate cash, and a little anxiety for the future, when some one of his most promising schemes had not fulfilled the promises of the prospectus; but he had never before felt, as he did now most poignantly, that others were dependent upon his exertions. At any cost Smeer must be kept away from Clarie, and it was of even greater importance that Wilmot should be released. The sense of new responsibility weighed heavily, though the novelty of the experience detracted slightly from its unpleasantness.

"And I've always told fellows who worry that they are fools," he soliloquised. "Perhaps a married man with a family may be excused, and I'm pretty much as if married. I've Clarie, and Wilmot's little but a kid."

He made one more attempt to borrow the money, and this final appeal removed any doubt he had as to the estimate his friends had of him. His last hope was an old chum, reputed rich, or at least well off, who opened the interview by inviting Hartley to help him out of a tight corner by taking up some shares for him. On being told the state of affairs and the object of the visit, he lectured Hartley on his criminal folly in squandering the large sums that he had at various times handled, held forth on the iniquity of drink, and pointed the moral by bluntly telling Hartley what people were saying of him.

The Yorkshireman listened patiently to the end,



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then remarked with emphasis that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to advance money on the shares and take quittance by the administration of the biggest hammering the lecturer had ever had.

The afternoon was too far advanced for further business, unless he could find his man in some bar. He gave fortune the opportunity by making a tour of the principal canteens, but drew a blank. Johannesburg financiers no longer used the bar counter as office after dark, and another phase of the altered conditions of the Camp was brought home to him.

There was a newer and stranger condition asserting itself,—the thought of a woman kept him sober.

“Clarie is better than a tight collar,” he admitted ; “doesn’t hurt so much.”

The evening was rather dull as the result of this unseen control, and the temptation to join some of the lively coteries at the bar of his hotel the keener because he had never before known what it was to resist. He had all but succumbed once when a practical remedy occurred to him. He went to his room, removed his boots, and gave them to the Kafir, with strict injunctions not to bring them back till six o’clock next morning. As he was travelling light without kit, he had not even a pair of slippers to fall back upon, and he knew that the day had gone when customers in stockinged feet would be tolerated in the bar of a leading hotel.

He rose next morning full of a great and serious resolve, evolved during the waking hours of a long night. By way of assisting its successful issue, he



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sent out for a tight collar, and by half-past nine was on his way to the office of the chairman of the B. K. Syndicate, one of the countless ventures always being engineered on the Rand to acquire and hold gold claims, building sites, and other possibilities of profit for small capitalists. The history of nine-tenths of these syndicates will be found in the record of small holders frozen out by the big companies. But the B. K. S. had been in existence more than two years, and was yet warm. Its assets consisted of eighty proved gold claims situate near a flourishing mine, and the syndicate was holding out for the time when the adjacent company would be compelled to buy up these claims in accordance with a scheme of extension foreshadowed by the directorate. Hartley was the registered holder of four of these claims, representing his share as the original pegger and discoverer, and had resolutely refused several tempting offers to sell out. The syndicate consisted of four members, who were bound by agreement not to part with their respective holdings except to one another—a usual stipulation, to prevent a block of claims being cut up into a parcel too small for the market. The chairman had several times hinted his readiness to take over Hartley's four claims; but the Yorkshireman's faith in their ultimate value was of the most extravagantly optimistic character, and had been partially confirmed soon after by an offer being made by a solicitor, acting for unknown, but presumably influential, principals, to take over the eighty claims at £500 apiece. The offer was unanimously



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declined by the syndicate, who ratified their act of faith by a resolution, formally adopted, not to sell under £1000 a claim. In those days small syndicates talked in big figures and sometimes realised them.

Hartley had summed up the position to the following effect: Ready cash he must have. His only means of getting it was by sacrificing these claims, which he had always regarded as his nest-egg. The sacrifice would be justified by the end, as the money thus obtained would secure him a fortune.

He found the chairman in, and stated his business, promptly offering the whole or part of his claims for £500 apiece.

Mr Sander's regretful assurance that he had not the money for the deal was the truth, so he tried to dissuade Hartley against selling; next he attempted to induce him to accept payment in a series of bills at three and six months, but as prompt cash was a desideratum, the offer had to be declined.

Mr Sander explained that there were only two other members of the syndicate to whom the shares could be offered. One was in England, therefore inaccessible; the other was Mr Percy Jones, to whom he advised Hartley to go.

Hartley knew little and liked less Mr Jones, against whom he had conceived one of those violent, unreasoning prejudices, that were an unfortunate trait in his impulsive character, for, like all men of strong likes and dislikes, he found that the world supplied more subjects for hatred than love. Mr Jones embodied



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in his dapper, middle-aged, and pompous personality nearly all the idiosyncrasies that most severely sand-papered Hartley's susceptibilities. He always wore the whitest and starchiest of linen, sign and token to Hartley of that prosperous town-bred exclusiveness that he associated with greedy scheming directors who were ignorant of veld-craft and the principles of mining, yet had the audacity to criticise the work of men like himself. Mr Jones never entered a canteen, and expressed himself severely against those who did. He also had an irritating habit of taking nothing for granted. He read every document he had to sign, carefully and slowly, asking numerous questions; he cross-examined engineers and others who brought up reports that were perfectly satisfactory to the other members of the syndicate, and was always ready to damp-down enterprise by insisting on the dangers of optimism and the urgent necessity for economy. But his crowning infamy was that he carried gloves and an umbrella in the wet and dry season alike. He never used either—but Hartley could not forgive him on that account: the only extenuating feature in his case was, that he did not wear a tall silk hat. As it was, he stood in the eyes of Hartley as a symbol of that devastating imported civilisation known by the hated name of respectability, that was slowly but surely killing the joyous spirit of unconventionality and absolute freedom that was the principal charm of a mining-camp. Therefore did Hartley hate Percy Jones.

As a matter of fact, the little man was simply a

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commonplace type of the pushing suburban grocer or draper transplanted to Commissioner Street, where he acted precisely as he did in his old environment, and had become a fairly successful small speculator, who, by industry, caution, not too much scrupulousness, and—according to Rand standards—the exercise of a contemptible parsimony, had contrived to employ his small capital to advantage. He was on the outer fringe of financial respectability, and paid obsequious court to the representatives of the big houses; but he was too cautious and too small to take a place with them, so had to be content with the crumbs and scraps too insignificant for the attention of the rich man. He talked in millions and dealt in ten-pound notes. What his actual resources were few knew, probably no one but himself. There was a rumour that he was playing with the money of the members of a South London conventicle, in which he had been a shining light. But Johannesburg shows no curiosity as to a man's antecedents: it is too dangerous a habit, and one that has peculiar rebounding properties. Percy Jones was so unobtrusive and microscopic a character on the financial stage that he might have been the most notorious absconding criminal without exciting more than a passing glance. And yet he was from the mould in which more than one Rand millionaire has been cast.

Hartley found him in his tiny one-roomed office, reasonably near the Exchange, and came to the point without any of that circumlocutory dodging round the subject which appeared to be the modern method of



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conducting negotiations that in the old days were decided in a monosyllable.

"Want to sell my four claims in the B. K. Buy 'em?"

Mr Jones deliberately finished the addressing of a letter, blotted it with irritating frequency, and, as Hartley afterwards put it, ran a protractor and T-square over it, to make certain that the stamp was well and truly laid on. Then he leaned back in his chair, put his finger-tips together, and surveyed Hartley, who had been filling up time by scraping out his pipe with a delicate little penknife he took from the desk.

"Six months ago, Mr Hartley, I should have availed myself of your offer, but claims—in fact, all mining property is not what it was, owing to the Raid."

"Oh, damn the Raid! Will you deal? I must have money."

Mr Jones looked supremely interested by this honest, and therefore foolish, admission. He shook his head sagely.

"I am afraid, Mr Hartley, you are not the only person in that position. I, myself, take a very serious view of the future, and have to practise severe economy and retrenchment."

"Feed at a shilling restaurant instead of an eighteenpenny, I suppose," Hartley interrupted. He was rapidly growing irritable.

Mr Jones ignored the rude reflection on his frugality. "If I took your claims, the price would have to be one that would leave a good margin for a falling market."

"Five hundred apiece."

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Dick was still scraping his pipe, and did not even look up.

"Impossible, ridiculous even. If that is your idea of business you are wasting your time and mine. By the way, how is that East Rand thing panning out? Really, Mr Hartley, I cannot understand how a man with your vast ability and knowledge and the magnificent chances you have had should be in want of a few paltry hundreds. You must have been very careless and foolish."

"You're right. I have been a fool to let other people profit by my work. I think I found this B. K. Reef, proved it at my own expense, worked and starved at it for months, and have to take a twentieth share, while you, who do nothing except grouse, hold half. And now, when I want to turn my bit into cash, I have to get your leave. Yes; I am a fool. But hurry up. I want money badly: if I can't deal with you, I must try some one else."

Mr Jones smiled. The chairman had rung him up on the telephone the moment Hartley had left the office and explained the position. "Give him a couple of hundred for a six months' option, and I'll stand in half," was his message. "He's hard pressed, and must consent."

"Why don't you try our chairman?" asked Jones slyly.

"He has made me an offer."

"Paper at six months, I suppose?"

Hartley was surprised and annoyed at the directness of the thrust.



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"Never mind that; what will you give me? Hurry up!"

Mr Jones refused to be hurried. The longer these negotiations lasted, the more desperate and pliable Hartley would become. So he played with his victim.

"Would you take the battery managership of a mine I know of? Fifty a-month, good quarters, and—possibilities." He peered into Hartley's face. Hartley returned the gaze inquiringly.

"What do you mean by possibilities?"

"Pickings."

"Oho!"

Hartley drew his chair closer and looked Jones straight in the face.

"What interest have you in getting me a job like that? Where do you come in?"

"No special interest, except that I happened to hear of the vacancy, and thought of you as the most suitable man I know."

"Very kind of you. How am I suitable? I'm a prospector and mining engineer, not a chemist."

"Look here, Mr Hartley. You are a sensible man—in some things. I make you an offer that many a man would jump at, and you behave as though I were doing something against you."

"I haven't refused it yet; but let's get on with this claim business; make me an offer."

"Very well; I told you I am not in a position to buy at a fancy price: first, because I haven't the money loose; secondly, because I have not the faith

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in the B. K. that you appear to have. I'll give you a thousand, cash down, for your claims."

"And you are the man who advised the syndicate to hold out for a thousand apiece!"

"Buying and selling are not the same, Mr Hartley. I am not obliged to buy your claims, therefore if I take them it will be at a price that suits me."

Hartley got up, looking stormy.

"Wait a bit,—don't be impetuous. It would be a pity to sell out now when prices are so low. Suppose you gave me a six months' option to take them at £400 apiece. I'll give you £150 for the right of refusal at that price."

Hartley hesitated. It was a terrible sacrifice, but — Wilmot! What was happening at Pretoria?

"It's a bad bargain, but it's a deal," he said.

Mr Jones promptly wrote out an option note, read, re-read, and altered it several times.

"It's in the usual form," he said, as he handed it to Hartley, who laid it on the desk without looking at it. "Cheque before signature, please."

Mr Jones wrote out his cheque, a long and tedious operation. Hartley examined it, put it into his pocket, then signed the option note.

"What about this battery managership and the pickings?" he asked, looking steadfastly at Jones.

"Surely, Mr Hartley, there is no occasion to tell an experienced man like you how a battery manager can increase his salary—if he has a trustworthy person outside." He looked up furtively.

Hartley stood up with both hands on the table, and



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glared at Jones, who quailed, for there was thunder in the air.

"You damned little scoundrel! You are an amalgam thief, eh? I guessed it all along, and you want me to steal for you, eh?"

The protest that was on Mr Jones's lips was never uttered. Hartley's open hand came heavily on his cheek, followed by a staggering slap from the left. Then he was dragged forward over the table and his head banged against it.

"That's what I think of you, you little thief. Now, call the police and tell them what I hammered you for."

Mr Jones did not call for the police. He gathered himself together with a surprising show of offended dignity and adjusted his dress, remarking quietly, "I excuse you, Hartley, for you are drunk, but you will hear more of this."

"Come over to the bank and bring that option note," said Hartley. "I must have witnesses that this business is honest on my side. I can't afford to be mixed up with a gold thief."

Mr Jones hung back, but when Hartley moved towards him he hurried to put on his hat, collected his umbrella and gloves, and followed.

"Go on ahead; I won't be seen in the street with you." Mr Jones meekly obeyed, and led the way to his bank.

"Look at that note," said Hartley to the teller. "I've sold him an option. Here's the cheque. Both all right, I hope?"

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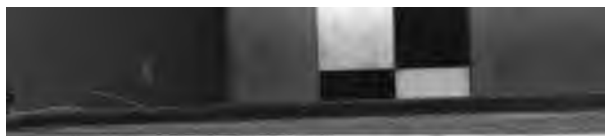
The teller glanced at both, and said they were. Hartley took up his money and went off, without further word to Jones.

The little man returned to his office chuckling. He was amused that the teller should have vouched for an option note that made the money paid part of the purchase price instead of the premium for the privilege. He would willingly take a hammering every day on such terms.

Hartley's luck took the line of a straight flush, as he described it, as soon as he had finished with Mr Jones, and he was half disposed to ascribe it to the Powers for Good that reward righteous acts, the act recognised in this case being the hammering of a rascal who would have made a thief of a needy man.

In any other place the fortuitous coincidences of the day would have been regarded as extraordinary. On the Rand they ranked merely as natural sequences in the run of luck that had set in. Hartley's heart was filled with greater and holier joy by the castigation he had administered to Jones than by the knowledge that his great scheme was in train. Having some hours to spare before his train was due for Pretoria, and a tight collar to keep him in check, he yielded to that spirit of gregariousness and generosity which he called feeling good, and took a cab to a remote bar, where he could practise his goodness with the least risk of having it abused by the spongers who had the eye of old Adam M'Queen for a man with an abnormal development of the organ of benevolence.

The Golden Kopje Hotel had been one of Hartley's



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retreats for several years, when desirous of recuperating at the later stages of a prolonged spree. The proprietor, an old mining man, was oddly enough a rigorous abstainer, and that curious anomaly, more frequent than might be believed, a drink seller with a conscience. Hartley had always found the Golden Kopje a safe haven. M'Cormick the proprietor nursed him with strong yet gentle hand, tapering off his drinks till he was restored to self-control, and, as often as not, sending him back to work under escort, and with the loan of a tenner.

"Turned up at last," was Mac's quiet salutation, as Hartley burst into the bar. "Found another place where they do mending and repairing, I suppose?"

He had heard that Hartley had been in Johannesburg several times without visiting him, and as Mac could not conceive Hartley loose in town without requiring the tapering-off treatment, he was hurt at the implied neglect and ingratitude.

"Haven't come to be mended this time. Come for a quiet chat and drink. Have struck a patch. Going to celebrate it very quietly. Give me small bottle."

Mac grunted deprecatingly, as if he resented the prospect of business; went to the little partitioned compartment at the end of the counter that served as his office, and returned with a large envelope, which he handed to Hartley, remarking—

"Thought you were going to make me a present of it. You'd better take it, though; your patches don't get beyond the green stage nowadays. You'll want it."

Hartley found fifty pounds in notes.

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"Thanks," he remarked carelessly. "Knew they'd be all right with you."

"Don't lie, Dick," Mac answered quietly. "You knew nothing about them. I took them off you one night six months ago. You came in very full up, and had a couple of beauties with you, who would have cleared you out if I hadn't. I've heard about your trying to borrow a bit."

Dick owned up, insisted on leaving a fiver to be drunk out by certain "good boys" whom he specified, finished his whisky, Mac having refused to serve him with a champagne, as it excited him too quickly, and travelled stationwards.

The first piece of luck brought the second in its train, for the excitement of this unexpected addition to his treasury drove from his mind the telegram he had intended to despatch to Wilmot, announcing the impending release. Had that knowledge come to the jail officials, a final and probably successful effort would have been made to force a confession from Wilmot. If it failed, he would have been transferred to Potchefstroom jail, in order to retard the process of release.

"Another turn of the screw and I'm certain I should have squealed," he confided to Hartley when, a few hours later, they sat together over the first decent meal he had tasted for two weary months. "I shall never forgive myself for mistrusting you, old chap, and I don't expect you to do so, for you can never understand what it is to have nothing but doubt to feed upon for



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two months, doubt being fed on silence half the time, and the other by the suggestions of those blackguards. Things did look black against you, Dick,—didn't they?"

"No," answered Dick emphatically. "I don't think I ought to excuse you except for your ignorance. If you knew better, you'd know enough to be satisfied that Dick Hartley had never played dog. Damn you! Wilmot, you make me feel wicked at the thought of it. If you didn't look so miserable and starved, I'd punch you. I'll go and knock it out of the blackguards who kept your letter back. Who were they?"

Wilmot wisely and truthfully answered that he did not know, and advised a prompt removal from the atmosphere of officialdom.

"They know nothing, but suspect a lot," was his summary of his story of the attempts to worm his secret from him in the jail.

"I had been a fool, no doubt, and brought all the trouble on myself and you by opening my mouth to Ellis. We shall be shadowed for some time; but I rely on your smartness to get over that difficulty."

They discussed the plan of campaign in the seclusion of a first-class carriage going down to Johannesburg that evening.

There was nothing now to prevent forward action. Wilmot was to stay quietly in Johannesburg for a few days, by way of throwing any followers off the track, while Hartley got Johannes Smeer back to his farm to prepare the waggon.

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The two parted at the station at Johannesburg. Wilmot went to the Golden Kopje to be quiet; Hartley took a ticket for the East Rand, as if returning to his work there, but slipped off the train a few stations out, and returned in a closed cab to Johannesburg.

Early next morning he had Smeer mounted on a hired horse, and off by road to his farm, forty-five miles distant. It was safer to smuggle him off this way than from the spy-infested railway-station, and the old man was more at home in the saddle. He took with him an order on a Krugersdorp storekeeper to provide provisions for the journey, and cash to pay for them, so as to avoid any mention of his principals. The loading up of the gear and return of the gun to Adam for completion was arranged with equally satisfactory unobtrusiveness.

Hartley sent for Adam to give him instructions that could not be intrusted to the post, and the visit was made the occasion of a farewell celebration at the Golden Kopje.

Adam proved a veritable skeleton at the feast. He was suffering from a combined attack of moral rectitude and pessimism, largely induced by the withdrawal of Wilmot from the Resurgam, necessitating the appointment of a successor, who would have to be educated into the keeping of a secret, since the conditions were not now favourable to scaring away authorised interlopers. There was also another burden on his mind. He had been promised £500 for his services in refitting the gun; but on discovering that



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his ideas as to the completion of the working mechanism were correct, he hinted that his reward should be doubled, for the following extraordinary reason: so long as the gun was unworkable his conscience was clear, for no harm could come to white men from its use by Kafirs; but now that he was able to make it a perfect engine of destruction, he was assisting in an enterprise both illegal and immoral, to say nothing of its danger.

"If you are found out, as you certainly will be," said he, "the Government are sure to guess that I fixed the thing up, for all the Rand knows my mechanical skill,—or at any rate they will, as soon as my motor is completed."

"If our secret doesn't come out till then, we have plenty of time," Hartley suggested brutally; and then followed one of those acrimonious arguments on mechanics that had ceased to amuse Wilmot because of their tiresome retrieving of old ground.

Hartley was in too good a humour to feel wicked, therefore he agreed to pay Adam a thousand pounds by way of salving his exacerbated conscience. The old man, on his part, solemnly agreed not to play any tricks with the machinery, but to deliver the gun in proper working order.

"Dick," said he, after the seventh and final whisky, "I know you're going to get into trouble, but do be careful. As soon as you get the diamonds hide away my share safely, for it would be awful if I got nothing for all this tearing o' my conscience."

CHAPTER XII.

ON TREK.

A WEEK after Wilmot left Pretoria jail he was on the first stage in the Great Trek. The plan of campaign necessitated a visit to Smeer's farm to procure riding-horses, and a good-bye call at Rietspruit. The journey from Krugersdorp to the farm was made by Cape cart, an expensive but convenient mode of travel. Hartley carried with him a parcel of literature for Clarie, selected with a little more care than usual, thanks to the guidance of Wilmot, and sundry trifles, appreciated by the feminine mind, intended as peace-offerings to Mrs de Villiers and Hendrika. According to Boer etiquette, their acceptance might be regarded as a pledge on the part of the recipients to treat Clarie better. The same etiquette required that Clarie should not be included in the distribution of gifts, but Hartley knew that the books would be prized far above anything else. He made his offering to the enemy with some trepidation, but was rendered happy by the enthusiasm with which it was received.

He had with considerable effort composed a little rewell speech to Clarie, but when the moment cam

for delivering it he was overwhelmed with an awkward shyness and loss of memory. The parting took place at the shady corner of the stoep, to which he had engineered her rather adroitly. He began by taking her hand, and in rather formal language said—

“Good-bye, Clarie. It may be a long time before we see one another again, but——”

There came a pause, which Clarie filled with an interrogative “Yes?”

This was not in the original scheme, and the pause continued. Perhaps it was more eloquent in its significance than the words that should have come, but refused to shape.

“I shall miss you very much,” Clarie said to help him. It was his turn to say “Yes?” “I do hope this business you are on will turn out nicely.”

“You may well wish that, because you have an interest in it.” Hartley was right off the track, and began to flounder.

“I?”

“Yes; you’re in on the ground-floor, and, if it pans out as well as the indications promise, I’m going to do the right thing, because, you see, you’ve had a good deal to do with it.”

Clarie expressed her surprise and incredulity.

“Yes,” Hartley went on, growing bolder, though his original speech had quite evaporated. “I look on you as the Syndicate. Syndicates stay at home and encourage the prospector, and of course you’ll get the lion’s share—Syndicates always do.”

“But I thought they stood in halves with the pro-

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spector—sometimes,” she laughed, preserving the simile.

“Yes, sometimes, when they are honest. I’m going to let you stand in halves—at any rate, you shall have the chance—when I come back.”

The femininely womanly asserted itself.

“When you come back you will look at the thing differently—especially if it has turned out well.”

“So you are like Wilmot: you think I would turn on a friend.” He spoke bitterly.

“I don’t understand you. How can you turn on me? I only mean that when you come back, if successful, you will have no need to trouble about me; you will be going away from the land—at least, that is what I understood from your talk the other day.”

“I didn’t mean it that way. Look here, Clarie, I’m not good at arguing with women; I get mixed and foolish. What I mean about that halving business—but it’s no good talking of halving till I’ve got something to halve. Wait till I come back, will you?”

She laughed.

“What else can I do? You don’t suppose I can wander about like you? I shall never leave the farm.”

“That’s what I wanted to talk about; but it will keep, eh? Good-bye, and don’t let the old woman worry you.”

They shook hands quietly. The rest of the family, who had been bidding a demonstrative farewell to Wilmot, closed in too thickly for the continuance of



confidential relations between Clarie and Hartley, and the shaking of twenty hands had to be got through.

The trek which the two adventurers had now begun was, apart from the risk entailed by its illicit nature, more than ordinarily hazardous. It involved a slow and circuitous journey of about two hundred miles—probably more, if need of extra caution took them off the direct route; all of it, after the first fifty miles, through a region nearly as virgin and difficult of access as it was in the days of the Voortrekkers,—for although the map showed that every yard was marked as occupied, the farms were mostly such in name only. Much of the country they would have to pass through was known as low veld and bush veld, and was occupied only in the winter by high-veld Boers, who brought their cattle here to escape the rigours of the southerly latitudes. Very few had houses, the entire family living in the waggon, or, at best, in a few tents or grass huts erected by their Kafir servants. The few dorps that lay on the line of march Hartley purposed avoiding as much as possible, relying upon the isolated Kafir trading-stores, kept by enterprising Europeans, mostly Russian Jews, for the replenishing of his commissariat.

There were good reasons why he did not wish to encounter Boer officials, never so alert and officious as during the six months that followed the Jameson Raid. The sleepest field-cornet awoke to something approaching alacrity and activity at the sound of the voice of a travelling Englishman. Every saddle-bag

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was suspected of containing belated despatches from Rhodesia, and a loaded waggon afforded scope for a search that would have shamed the most energetic Customs officer by its thoroughness. A strange Rooinek passing through a remote district had become a thing of terror, and more than suspicion; and even the guarantee of good faith provided by the presence of an oprecht Burgher like Johannes Smeer was hardly a set-off against the preponderating weight of two Rooineks.

As to the fearsome cargo Hartley had little apprehension, unless investigations were conducted with saws and axes. In outward appearance the headgear and the long steel drill were all they were supposed to be, and only an engineer or mining-man would notice that the specific gravity of the pine-wood timbers was rather above the average. And heavy, indeed, the load was. The gun itself was of small account, embedded in a block of timber that occupied little space; but the cartridges were a serious matter. They alone weighed close on three tons without their wooden casings; and as the maximum load for a waggon and sixteen oxen, even on good roads, was two and a half tons, the question of safe transport threatened to become a serious one in view of the poorness of the oxen and the age of the waggon, which, as Johannes said, had been long enough on the road to know its own way over most of South Africa. The roads over which it would be dragged for two hundred miles differed only from the mountain and veld they traversed by being not absolutely im-

passable, and for the greater part of the way it would need an expert to define them.

Hartley's heart failed him, and visions of a premature breakdown appalled, when towards sunset of the first day he espied the waggon outspanned by the side of a good road. According to arrangements, it should have been at least a day's trek farther on. Smeer was fast asleep in the tilt at the back of the waggon when they rode up. Hartley angrily demanded to know the reason for this snail's pace. The old man quietly explained that he had dreamt the night before that the Rooineks had deserted him, and he had resolved to wait until their presence belied the vision.

The trip was a thing of joy to Wilmot, new to the charm and novelty of waggon-travel, which few Englishmen fail to appreciate until custom and necessity have robbed it of its fascinations. He found a thrilling, boyish delight in every phase of the day's duties,—riding or walking by the side of the waggon for miles, taking in new life with the magnificent rarefied atmosphere, feeling the poetic and artistic in his impressionable nature stirred by the rugged grandeur of the scenery and the illimitable landscape, which grew less monotonous and more varied with every mile. In two days they had left the desert-like grass plains of the high veld, and had entered a country that fitted more perfectly the ideas of South African scenery popularised by artist and word-painter. It is true that the mighty forests were represented only by expanses of bush veld whose trees would barely



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conceal an ox, but viewed from the top of some ridge they fulfilled all the duties of a forest in landscape, with the added charm of being forbidden ground because of the reported presence of so many black mammas, the most dreaded of African snakes.

Golosh, the christianised Kafir, was of the party, and his *répertoire* of gruesome stories of dire conflicts between man and beast was extensive. For a native whose best years had been spent on a mission-station in one of the most civilised parts of Cape Colony, he had a surprising acquaintance with the life of the wilds, and many an explorer would have given much to have seen half the fearsome creatures which, in defiance of the laws of geographical distribution, had obliged Golosh with sight of their manners and customs.

Day after day the waggon grated or rumbled slowly on over undulating veld, up or along the sides of stony kopjes or mountain-ranges, across rivers whose shallowness was compensated for by perpendicular banks, up which the waggon had to be hauled and pushed by man and beast with an expenditure of effort that approached cruelty. For miles the route would be through a bit of country so delightfully level that motion became a pleasure, the wheels sliding over the smooth long grass with no impediment save an occasional ant-hill or grass-covered boulder. Then a long outspan would be the necessary preface to a stormy passage over rocks and gullies, along the sides of hills at an angle that seemed to defy the laws of gravity, and which nothing but a goat or a South





African waggon could attempt. Often a long and timber-shivering pull, that left the oxen too exhausted to wince when the cruel thirty-foot lash cut their flanks, would be terminated abruptly by a donga,—a yawning gash in the earth that extended a mile or more to right and left. Sometimes there was no alternative but a return over the track passed with so much pain and effort, or a flank movement along the edge of the donga—dangerous and exhausting.

Old Smeer, Boer-like, had at first insisted that he knew the road, having heard it described by farmers who had made the pilgrimage to the low veld, and on the whole his memory of their instructions served him well. But the rains of a wet summer had obliterated most of the landmarks, and as few Boers had yet trekked in this direction, there came a time when Smeer had to confess that he had lost his bearings, and advised a halt of a day while he rode ahead to spy out the lay of the land. He returned next day with satisfaction writ large on his otherwise inexpressive face, and announced a heroic resolve. He had discovered the track, but to reach it one of two things had to be done—either they must retrace their weary way some twenty miles, or the waggon must be tied up and lowered from the edge of the high plateau where they had halted into the valley below.

When the plan was explained to Wilmot he stood aghast. The side of the hill it was proposed to launch the waggon down sloped at an angle varying between thirty-five and forty-five degrees. It was largely covered with grass, but the many gullies, projecting

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ridges, and huge boulders seemed to offer insuperable obstacles. To an Englishman the proposal appeared madness; but the craft of a Boer transport rider is a thing of marvel, that may only be witnessed and described by those whose probity and character stand assured. Johannes Smeer had ridden transport in the days when Kimberley was young, and the rates stood at thirty shillings the hundredweight, and were not to high. This same old waggon had bumped up the Gibraltar, from which the Devil's Kantoor looks down on Barberton, and Smeer had steered it across the Drakensberg through a pass that the stoutest Voortrekker deemed impregnable. To him the lowering of a waggon five hundred feet down a slope, which he described as smooth as the roof of a house, was child's play.

Wilmot watched with fascinated interest the process of making the wheels immovable with strips of raw-hide called reims,—the veld man's rope,—twine, and wire combined; helped to remove some of the smaller articles that could not be thoroughly secured; and with beating heart saw the oxen taken out and the heavy waggon directed sideways over the cliff. It ran for twenty yards with its own momentum, then brought up in a hollow. All hands ran to the rescue, laid a course diagonally down the side, and another space was cleared. The next lap was finished on the top of a boulder, and much labour and ingenuity were needed to bring the waggon into position for the next run; but half an hour's work did it, and then began a series of slides, some smooth and gentle,

others a succession of shocks, bumps, and threats of capsize. Again and again Wilmot saw the unwieldy mass dashing on to destruction on a boulder; but a skilful deflection of the pole or disselboom, that stood out like a bowsprit or outrigger, had the effect of a touch on the tiller of a sailing boat, and steered the craft into smooth water. Within an hour the waggon was awaiting the arrival of the oxen, which had been taken down by a track that required as careful negotiation as that of the waggon.

The climbing of difficult hills was a sight Wilmot could not endure, because of the suffering inflicted upon the patient, meek-eyed oxen. Frequently a couple of hours would be expended in getting the waggon up a hundred yards of steep incline by a process of zig-zagging that would have been easy but for the task of turning the sixty yards of oxen on the trek chain: more than half the load had to be removed before the ascent could be attempted, and laboriously dragged up piece by piece. But the new track discovered by Smeer got gradually better, and the time- and temper-exhausting mountaineering became less frequent.

Occasionally Wilmot and Hartley rode off the track a few miles to put up a buck or bustard and guinea-fowl, that relieved the monotony of the eternal tinned meats. But Hartley was not in favour of these excursions: he was fearful of encountering some wandering party of Boers, whose suspicions might be excited and cause delay, while they communicated with the district field-cornet. Hartley had thought-

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fully provided himself with a prospector's licence in proper form; but it was more than probable that the field-cornet would not be able to read it, and would insist on his right to prevent progress until an interpreter had been found. The Johannesburg papers had lately recorded cases of travellers being detained many days until their documents had been verified, and with all his courage Hartley feared the consequences of having his name brought prominently under the notice of Boer officialdom. It had taken too great an interest in him of late.

On the tenth day of the trek the expected happened. They came upon an elderly Boer who, with his family and cattle, was trekking to his winter farm. His waggon was outspanned a few miles to the right, on the road that Hartley would have been travelling, but that it led through a dorp he was anxious to avoid.

The Boer pulled up fifty yards from the party, and sat in the saddle reconnoitring. After a time he cautiously advanced, announced that he was Van Enter of the Ermelo district, and put the customary questions to the travellers. Smeer acted as spokesman.

Instead of allaying suspicion, the old man's presence had the opposite effect. Van Enter could understand a party of ignorant Rooineks travelling off the road, but it puzzled him to find such a blunder made by a Boer like Johannes Smeer, and with Afrikander directness he put his suspicion into words. With tactless bluntness Smeer confessed that the Rooinek had

chosen the route, as he did not want to pass through dorps.

Hartley heard the foolish statement, and drew on his resourcefulness promptly.

"I have gone off the road to find the elandsboontje [elandsbean]. I have an Irish doctor with me who makes good medicine out of it for my sickness."

Van Enter grew interested. Next to the Predikant, the Boer respects the doctor, and is often more willing to hear of a new physic than of a cure by faith and prayer.

"Have you seen any elandsboontje?" Hartley went on, well knowing that the plant was very rare in that region. "We have been told that there is a kind hereabouts worth all the others."

Van Enter was completely bluffed. He came up to the waggon, which had stopped, shook hands with grave respect with Wilmot the Irish doctor, accepted a soupie of brandy, and entered into general conversation. All the time he was eyeing the gear.

"What is that?" at last he asked.

Hartley told the story made to fit the load.

"Whose farm are you going to prospect?" was the next question.

Hartley was not prepared for this, and mentioned a name haphazard.

Van Enter was puzzled. He knew, he said, every Boer in the district mentioned, but had never heard of Eckhout.

"He is in Pretoria. He went to fight Jameson," Hartley explained.

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"What were you doing when Jameson came in?" was the next embarrassing question.

"Prospecting on the East Rand."

"And your friend the doctor, where was he?"

"He is only just come into the land."

"Did he, then, come with Jameson?"

Hartley laughed. "Did I not say he was an Irishman?"

Van Enter was silenced. After a pause he inquired whether the doctor would ride over to the waggon and see his vrouw, who had been sick for many months.

Hartley answered that nothing would make the doctor happier, and in low tones he explained the situation to Wilmot. It had been arranged beforehand that he was in emergency to play such a *rôle*. An Irishman was not a schelm Rooinek in Boer esteem, and if he were, his medical qualifications atoned.

Van Enter rode off to prepare his wife for the visit, while Wilmot got ready the physic, without which academic qualifications counted for nothing. He made up a big bottleful of a harmless liquid compounded of liquorice, cayenne pepper, Worcester sauce, and salt. It contained all the external essentials of good physic, being black, thick, and nauseous, and, doubtless, equally efficacious for internal and external application.

Hartley and Wilmot rode over after their oxen had been outspanned and the midday meal disposed of. They found the usual multitudinous family of bare-footed children, as healthy as dirty, who for the most part dodged the ceremony of handshaking, probably in



awe of the doctor and his art. Mrs Van Enter, fat and ponderous, lay curled up on the bedding spread over the bottom of the covered waggon. She listened apathetically to her husband's description of the doctor's abilities, and began a long recital of her ailments since marriage. Hartley interpreted with a perfectly straight face, and *sotto voce* advised that the administration of the physic be postponed to the last.

"These Boers watch the effect of first doses very carefully, and if anything should happen—well, we had better not be near."

The proceedings had been overlooked through a tear in the tilt-cloth by a bulky girl of about seventeen, who presently showed herself at the front of the waggon.

"Mother," said she, "you are verneuked. This is no real doctor. It is Cecil Rhodes and Dr Jameson. Look!" and she thrust into her mother's face a portrait of the great man cut from an English illustrated paper.

The announcement of the presence of a puff-adder in the bed would not have caused more consternation. The woman stared from the picture to Hartley, and shrank back as if she feared he would strike her. Her husband gave one glance at the portrait, then put a hand on Hartley's shoulder.

"Are you Rhodes?" he demanded; "for if you be, then this doctor must be Jameson."

Wilmot was startled; for though he understood no Taal, the production of the portrait gave him a clue to what was happening. Hartley preserved his self-

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control: he was fully alive to the menace of the danger.

"If I were the millionaire Rhodes, should I be on trek with a rotten old waggon and a span of poor oxen?" he asked quietly.

The objection was invincible. The wealth of Rhodes was proverbial, and wealth to a Boer always took the concrete form of good cattle and a brand-new gaily painted waggon. Van Enter had commented on the ramshackle appearance of Smeer's transport plant. He turned to his daughter.

"You are foolish, Kaatje. Rhodes has much money. What would he be doing with a span like that?"

"But the Burghers took all his transport at Doornkop. It is Rhodes running away to Delagoa," the girl protested with angry insistence.

The situation looked serious, for this new argument weighed with Van Enter, as feminine logic ever does with a Boer.

"Did you ever hear that Rhodes could talk the Taal as I do? And what should Rhodes be doing here when he has all Cape Colony to move about in?" Hartley asked.

Van Enter was still doubtful. The outside Boer had only partially awakened from the nightmare terrors of the Raid, and though the event was four months old, it was being discussed in the remote districts as if it were the sensation of the previous week.

"Suppose I were Rhodes," Hartley continued, "should I not make you sell me your waggon and



oxen, which are so much better than mine? Instead of that, I do not even tell you I want them. I let my doctor physic your vrouw, and I give you a soupie of good brandy, taking nothing from you. Does that look like Rhodes?"

Van Enter began to be impressed. The Boer conception of the character of the Colossus had been well presented.

"And you talk of likenesses. Many a foolish fellow has taken me for Rhodes, but I am not so nearly like him as you are to a Boer who stole my horse by Ermelo last year."

Van Enter looked uneasy for a few moments; then the humour of the situation appealed to him, for he laughed, and Hartley knew that all danger was past, since laughter kills the reason in an Afrikander.

Within ten minutes Van Enter had produced his bottle of carefully-conserved dop brandy, Wilmot had administered a half-pint of his physic to the vrouw, who took it with the nonchalance and ease of a confirmed hypochondriac, and all parted as friends.

Van Enter had invited Hartley to join forces with him and trek along the same route. The Yorkshireman quite appreciated the advantage of travelling under the escort of a Burgher known in and knowing the district, and would have been glad to accept the offer. But the progress of a Boer on trek with his flocks and herds was too tedious for an expedition costing £2 a-day for waggon-hire alone and rapidly running short of provisions.

In order to allay any lingering suspicion on the

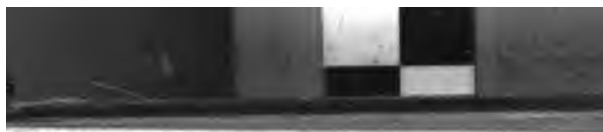
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part of the Boer, Hartley accepted his escort through the last dorp on the line of march, but was careful to make no stay there; for dorp officialdom, having plenty of time on its hands, might prove inquisitive. Hartley did not feel comfortable till he was outspanned six miles beyond the dorp. He sent Smeer and the Kafirs back to make such purchases as were necessary, and took advantage of the dying moon to work a trek that put twenty miles between him and the representatives of Pretoria.

The country had again become uniformly wild and difficult, and a late rain had softened and cut up the roads into morass or gully. The oxen began to give up, and longer and more frequent rests and shorter treks were imperative.

The waits gave Wilmot ample opportunity for gratifying his exploratory instinct by rides off the track in quest of game and topographical enlightenment. Hartley still strongly opposed these solitary excursions, and by way of deterrent told many stories of new-comers, and even old hands, being left to die in the veld as the result of a broken limb obtained while scaling some rugged height. Veld lore has hundreds of these records, all sufficiently tragic to need no embellishment.

As they struck the road that led to the once famous gold-fields of the Murchison Range, they came upon an object-lesson in one of the most pathetic memorials ever erected over a nameless grave. Beneath a large thorn-tree was a heap of stones, almost breast-high, which tradition says marks the resting-place of an



unknown white man, who, with a native servant, was prospecting and hunting in this region in the early Eighties. He died from the effect of some such accident as Hartley prophesied for Wilmot. Evidently the Kafir had possessed a larger share of the virtue of gratitude than is usually accredited to his race, for he had carved on the trunk of the tree in large rude letters this simple tribute to his dead master—

GOOD BAAS.

The district contains many uninscribed memorials to the unknown wardens of the Empire who have fallen by the way, whose memory lives only in some distant home beyond the seas, or perchance in the breasts of the companions of the trek, who passed through the most heartrending of travails that friendship can suffer,—watching one die to whom no help can be given, then digging his lonely grave and leaving him to the eternal solitude of the wilderness. Twice had Hartley undergone this ordeal, and the sight of these tragic reminders of the shadows of the veld depressed him for the rest of that day.

“Wilmot,” said he, as the two sat smoking under the waggon that evening, “I want you to make a note of something I have forgotten. If we pull this thing through, and anything should happen to me like that”—he had been telling the story of the death and burial of a companion in Mashonaland—“all my share goes to Clarie. But bear in mind, Wilmot, only on condition that she doesn’t marry that——”

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He jerked his pipe in the direction where Smeer was sleeping wrapped in his blankets.

"I'll see it through, Dick; but there's no occasion to talk of pegging out."

"I've got to finish up somewhere; why not now? It would be like my luck to knock under just as I had pulled off the biggest thing in my life."

This was the first time Hartley had made any reference to what Wilmot had long since guessed was an understanding between him and Clarie. He felt encouraged to put a question—

"I suppose if it's not a funeral here, it will be a marriage there?"

Hartley replied quite frankly:

"Yes, it's all fixed up. At any rate, I think it is, or it would be if I was not such an ass when it comes to talking to women. Look here"—he became very earnest—"I don't know whether it's the same with other chaps, but when I'm away from Clarie I can think of all sorts of things I want to say to her, and the proper way to say them, but I'm hanged if it doesn't all slip away as soon as I get within range, and I can only drivel. Rum, isn't it? I can say what's on my mind to men, and I have told the wife of an up-country canteen-keeper what I thought of her cooking and her dirty bedroom, but as soon as I get with Clarie I'm frozen."

"How did you manage with—the other one?"

"Don't talk of her. She was not the same class as Clarie. Man, but it makes me wicked when I think what a fool I was over her. You see, she was the

first good-looking woman that I had seen in the country,—women of any kind were scarce on the Rand in those days, and I suppose I was a bit of a griffin. But it served me right. Her bolting with the marriage-presents was rough on me, as I had to pay for them all. It made me look a fool. Yes, I could talk to her all right: not that I had much chance, she did all that; there was no shyness about her. But never mind her. What about you? Who gets your pile if anything happens? Hendrika?"

Wilmot laughed. "A man doesn't leave a fortune to the first girl that amuses him."

Hartley looked up quickly, then puffed at his pipe and relit it—sure sign of mental perturbation.

"She amuses you, eh? Is there any one else?"

"Yes, my mother. I owe her a bit."

Hartley seemed relieved, and the hard, angry look that usually prefaced trouble melted.

"Now you talk sense. Like to hear a chap talk of his mother. We're selfish brutes, Wilmot. Write her name and address."

During the next few days Hartley became curiously morose. He was in a morbid humour, that manifested itself in captious criticism of everything South African, and railing against the fate which had bound him to the country. It is a psychological condition that most home-born Colonials suffer from at times, and its effect on the new-comer, keenly appreciative of his new environment, is irritating and depressing. The prospect of being able to return to the homeland seemed to have intensified the seamy side of the life



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that had been his for twenty years. Wilmot found him a sore impediment to the full enjoyment of an experience that stirred the spirit of adventure latent in the breast of the British boy—and Wilmot was little more. Hartley took a malicious delight in deprecating all those phases of the life of the veld that charmed his impressionable companion. He refused to see either sense or pleasure in Wilmot's fondness for squatting over a camp-fire that only repaid the toil of feeding it by belching its smoke and flame in his face with every gust. If he did come near it, it was because the smoke drove away the swarms of winged insects that made it impossible to burn a lamp under the stuffy waggon-tent. He refused to eat the buck shot with so much toil by Wilmot because it was tasteless, and the fish because they were bony. Even Wilmot was bound to confess that the poetry of a bed in the grass beneath the canopy of heaven, fanned by the gentle zephyrs of the silent night, degenerated into very rough prose after he had twice been trampled by a prowling ox, found a snake in his blanket, and his body covered with crawling ants. After that he slept beneath the waggon-tilt, preferring the close unwholesome atmosphere, the mosquitoes, and moths, to the larger horrors of the bivouac by the camp-fire. Very early in the trek he had accepted Hartley's assurance that the sun could be safely left to rise without his supervision. On the one or two occasions that he had conformed to the convention that requires travellers to rise at daybreak

to enthuse over the sunrise in the mountains, the poetic spirit had been damped by the soul-searching chilliness of the morning mist, and his lungs choked by the smoke from the fire of damp wood. A few more such disenchantments, and the iterative grumbling of his companion, completely killed the gipsy spirit in him, and reaction set in. He began to feel the discomforts of the trek,—the monotonous fare of tinned meats; the coarse underdone bread baked in the gritty ashes; the tea and coffee so similar in taste and appearance that they could be substituted without detection; the ever-present thirst, that he feared and loathed to quench with the muddy liquid of the turbid streams; and, worse than all, the necessity of abstaining from washing, because of the filthy water, but mainly for the reason that the sun-burned skin could not bear the torture. Then the sufferings of the wretched oxen under the lash and the strain of a load too great filled him with passionate repugnance, and the approach to a hill or bad place in the road was always the signal for him to ride out of sight and sound of the cruel work. The first experience of an ox-waggon trek is ever a sore trial to the man who has any tenderness in his heart for animals. Then if, as sometimes happened, an accession of traveller's trials goaded Wilmot to an expression of disgust and disappointment, another peculiarity of the old Colonial showed itself in Hartley, who sneered at him for a tenderfoot, and wound up a scathing rebuke of his effeminacy by

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demanding to know why he remained in a country so obnoxious. Wilmot would feel hurt at the absence of logic and justice, for he had not seen enough of the Colonial to know that, like a parent, he claimed the right to disparage his offspring, but resented the same privilege in another.



CHAPTER XIII.

BLACKMAIL.

BUT, despite drawbacks and discomforts, the trek had prospered exceedingly. No officious field-cornet had intruded his unwelcome person, and not a soul suspected the secret of the neatly-painted timbers that occupied so little room in the waggon, yet formed a burden whose magnitude the unfortunate oxen knew too well. Old Smeer proved throughout an expert transport rider, knowing and doing his difficult work in a manner that excited the profoundest admiration of Wilmot, to whom it came as a revelation that the driving of a span of oxen was an art of wondrous complexity. Never for a minute could the vigilance of the driver be relaxed. The brake demanded as much care as the tiller of a sailing-boat, and Smeer's hand was fifty times in the hour tightening or loosening the screw to check the waggon as it rushed down an incline, or ease it over a boulder that would have wrecked anything save a South African waggon. When not at the brake, Smeer was wielding the huge whip that cracked and whistled in the air with a sweep as deft and clean as that of the rod and

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line in the hand of a practised thrower of the fly, and its biting lash would take a delicate strip of skin out of the hide of an ox thirty feet away, and within an inch of the spot aimed at. Yet amid this expenditure of ceaseless effort Smeer kept up his interminable cheering and threatening in the Volapuk of the span that is understood by every trek ox from Cape Agulhas to the Zambesi. Little wonder that the moment the last ox had been released from the span the old man threw down his whip and crawled under the waggon. Like the animals, he could sleep at will, but, unlike them, at unbroken length. His companions had little of his society during the out-span. When awake he spoke little, except to the Kafirs, cooked his own food, and never by any chance manifested the slightest curiosity as to the objective of the journey. Wilmot remarked on this, and asked Hartley how he thought the old man would behave when he found, as he must, sooner or later, that he had been assisting in the perpetration of a crime held in especial detestation by his race.

"Let's wait till he finds out," was Hartley's reply.

Only once did the old man fail at his work. One day, towards the end of an easy trek, he turned to answer a question addressed to him by Hartley, riding behind. That moment the waggon took a plunge into a hollow, and before Smeer could screw up the brake the increasing momentum had gained the mastery. The waggon overran the two after-oxen or wheelers, dragging the poor brutes over the fortunately

smooth ground, then crashed into a projecting boulder that smashed the near front wheel into matchwood.

The three men gazed at each other, speechless in the face of a calamity so terrific. Hartley was the first to recover.

"This means a week's outspan, while we hunt the country for a farmer who has a spare wheel. Where is the nearest farm, Johannes?"

Johannes honestly confessed ignorance, and with the maddening disregard for time that is part of Boer religion, coolly proposed to ride back till he met Van Enter, who, knowing the country, might be able to tell them where to look for help. In the absence of a more practical suggestion this was adopted, and at sun-up next morning the old man set off cheerily on what might prove a fifty-mile ride, his sole sustenance for the two days' journey a strip of biltong that hung from his ancient saddle, and looked part of it.

"There will be nothing for us to do for a week except eat up our stores," said Hartley at breakfast; "so I'll ride ahead and look at the track, and maybe go on to 'Mpfeu's kraal to arrange for Kafirs to carry in the gear in the event of our getting no wheel."

Half an hour later he was away, and Wilmot sat, a solitary white man in a region virgin and silent as any in South Africa.

There was no other horse, therefore his excursions were perforce limited to such areas as he could traverse afoot. He missed the companionship of Hartley terribly the first day, but on the next Golosh mod-

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estly proposed an excursion to a not too distant valley where some good fishing was to be had. The mission-school training had not eradicated the innate instinct for the life of the veld. The Kafir knew much of veld-craft, and the observant Wilmot learned much from him, for their environment supplied ample material. Game abounded, from the graceful springbok and lordly though fast-disappearing koodoo, with its horns like billiard-cues, to the liliputian of the buck species, the beautiful little ipiti, no bigger than a toy-terrier and quite as sprightly and alert. The pool that provided the fish was also the home of an ugly though harmless six-foot iguana, of whom fearsome stories are told by the Boers. At the instigation of Golosh, Wilmot watched for hours in hopes of catching a glimpse of that apocryphal python which has swallowed several spans of oxen in various parts of South Africa since the day, thirty years ago, when he was discovered by a truthful and oprecht Burgher at Wonderfontein finishing the four survivors of a flock of sheep. The python did not materialise, but a ten-foot black mamba appeared as substitute, and ruthlessly upset all travellers' tales of snake ferocity in the presence of man by scuttling to cover at lightning speed. Golosh, like most christianised Kafirs, had a keen perception of what interested white men recently "out," and needed very little encouragement to exercise it. He had accompanied the author of 'Ten Days in South Africa' on his adventures, and had earned immortality by an appreciative and honourable mention in that authori-



tative work, for which he had supplied much of the material. He knew, he said, where lions, crocodiles, hippopotami, and elephants were to be found, all conveniently near their outspan. He was a veritable Jamrach, prepared to supply any wild animal the credulous traveller might fancy, but the non-appearance of the creatures at last excited Wilmot's suspicions, and he expressed them in suitable language.

Golosh was equal to the emergency. "All these animals are here," said he, "but most Englishmen are hard to make believe. I never tell Baas Hartley of these things, for he believes so little that he would make me go and find them, and you know Boers won't let Kafirs carry guns, so why should I go into danger?"

"But if these things are in the land, why should Baas Hartley not believe you?" Wilmot asked.

"Because he says he knows Christian Kafirs."

Wilmot did not pursue the subject.

One morning Golosh made a disconcerting discovery. He brought a handful of cartridges, explaining that they had fallen out of the big timber on the waggon. Wilmot suppressed his consternation, and at the first opportunity examined the gear. The end of one of the larger timbers had warped, through exposure to the sun, and loosened the nails that held the two parts. The shock that had smashed the wheel had also strained and split the boards that masqueraded as solid timbers, and a dozen cartridges had fallen out, while others were sufficiently exposed to reveal the nature of the lining of the supposititious head-gear.



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Wilmot was in a fever of anxiety to know whether Smeer had penetrated their secret, but he dared not excite the curiosity of Golosh by asking questions. He contrived an excuse for sending him and the other Kafirs away from the waggon, while he hastily repaired the damage and covered it with a heavy packing-case. The discovery scared and worried him. He mounted guard over the waggon all day, and lay awake half the night, fearing that the secret would be probed by the Kafirs while he slept. Once he ventured to ask Golosh if he had found any more cartridges, but if the boy suspected anything his manner did not betray him. Wilmot tried to persuade himself that the secret was intact, but the damage was so glaringly apparent that he found it difficult to believe the naturally inquisitive and keen-eyed Kafirs had not detected it. Golosh's silence on the matter was also terribly suspicious, for a Kafir will talk for an hour over trifles less important, and exhaust his vocabulary and his cunning in an attempt to prove that he had nothing to do with the accident.

The time passed with deadly slowness, now that Wilmot dared not leave the vicinity of the waggon. He had nothing to read, so in sheer desperation he inspanned Golosh as tutor, and tried to learn a few Kafir words and phrases. But the ever-present anxiety obtruded itself to the exclusion of aught else, and Golosh marvelled at the dulness of his pupil, and one day expressed himself in terms that would have ensured him a vigorous thrashing had Baas Hartley heard him.



"I don't think white men are as clever as natives in some things," said he. "I speak well and good the English, the Hollands, the Taal, the Basuto, some Griqua, and the Zulu, but you Englishmen speak only your own tongue, and speak Zulu like children."

Johannes Smeer returned the fourth day after his departure. He seemed concerned at the absence of Hartley, but beyond a curt intimation that the wheel was coming had little to say about his mission, taking refuge in his unfamiliarity with English. Wilmot watched him closely, and thought he hovered at the back of the waggon much more than was necessary for an examination of a broken wheel at the other end. Two days later Hartley returned, bringing with him a fine-looking Kafir, whom he introduced as Bulalie, head induna to 'Mpfeu. Smeer treated the induna with the unconcealed brusquerie and masterfulness that the Boer displays towards all Kafirs, whether chiefs or kitchen-boys, and accepted Hartley's half-truthful explanation of his presence with marked disapproval.

"I have the wheel; we want no strange Kafirs to help us," he said curtly.

Hartley inquired where the wheel was.

"It doesn't come till you and I have had an indaba" (serious talk).

Hartley looked puzzled, and Wilmot's heart beat fast, for Smeer had spoken in English, and with a marked emphasis that satisfied him the secret was out.

"Give me a minute before you talk to him," he whispered, and walked away, Hartley following. When

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out of ear-shot Wilmot, in a few words, told of the matter of the cartridges and his suspicions. Hartley was silent for a time, then his habitual promptitude asserted itself.

"Then he knows, and is going to blackmail us. He doesn't leave this place if he plays monkey. I'll hear what he has to say. Keep cool and stand by me," he whispered, and walked up to Smeer.

"Well, what about the wheel?" he asked in English.

"Come where we can talk and I'll tell you," the old man answered in the Taal.

"No, speak English. My partner must hear what you have to say."

Smeer, disregarding the warning, went on in the Taal.

"You are doing a wicked thing, Hartley, and you are going to bring trouble on me, an oprecht Burgher of the State."

"Don't preach, tell me what you know and what you want. I suppose you want more money?"

Smeer seemed surprised at the fearless, almost threatening tone.

"Yes, I ought to have more money, I am doing a wrong thing."

"How?"

"You are taking cartridges to the Magatese Kafirs."

"Suppose I am, how are you going to stop me?"

"Ach, Mr Hartley, you think because I am an Afrikander that I am not slim. I have told my friends, those who are letting me have the wheel, and

if I am not back with them to-morrow to tell them all is right they are coming to catch you. You cannot get away, so you must give me what I want."

"What do you want?" Hartley asked, after a successful struggle to resist his natural impulse to knock the old man down.

"It is this, Mr Hartley, I know you are going to get diamonds for these cartridges."

"How do you know that?"

"Did you not tell Clarie and Coos Piet that you are after diamonds, and do I not know that there are no diamonds north of the Vaal River, just as there is no gold south of it? And do I not know that these Kafir chiefs have many? You see, I have thought this thing out very hard and strong, Mr Hartley."

"Well, come to business; what do you want to make it right with your friends?"

"Mr Hartley, you know I want money that I may do no more transport riding and marry Clarie."

"How much?"

"I want £500, and you must promise to make Clarie want to marry me."

Hartley laughed.

"You must be a fool, Johannes, or you would know that no man can make a woman change her mind when it is a matter of liking or disliking."

"Ach, but you are slim with women. She will do what you tell her."

Hartley lit up his pipe and bungled it.

"Look here, Johannes, I'll make a bargain with you. You say you want money to marry Clarie. I can

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give you that, but I cannot give you the woman if she refuses, but, as you say, I have good ways with her. Now, Clarie does not like you, but you can do much to alter that?"

"How? Tell me how, Mr Hartley?" the old man asked eagerly.

"You must take your Bible oath that you will make it right with your friends and help me through; then I will give you £500, and tell Clarie that you are truly an oprecht Burgher, because you keep your word and do not lead the blind into a pitfall."

"And will you say to her that she must marry me?"

"I will tell her she must do so if she can like you, and you can help her to do that by doing what I say."

"Mr Hartley, I will take my Bible oath to anything you wish."

"That's all right, Johannes. Now about your friends. How much do they want?"

"Nothing. I said nothing to them, for I did not know about the cartridges till my Kafirs told me when I came back yesterday. Ach, Mr Hartley, but I *am* slim," and the old man leant against the waggon and laughed a shrill falsetto.

"Then they don't know anything at all?"

"I have no friends, man. Van Enter told me where I should find an old waggon left in a marsh about eight hours from here, and I found it; and I am going to take my boys and bring the wheel away," and he laughed long and loudly.

"So you have verneuked me?"

Smeer could not speak. He simply nodded assent, and continued to let out his piercing staccato shrieks.

"With all his cunning he has overreached himself," was Wilmot's remark when Hartley told him the story.

"How?"

"He has no security."

Next moment he regretted his speech. Hartley turned on him furiously.

"No security! Damn you, is that still your idea of me? Don't you know that Dick Hartley never goes back on his word? Do you take me for a Boër verneuker? No wonder you thought I had sold you at Pretoria. I tell you I shall keep every part of my agreement. I shall pay him his five hundred, and out of my share, mind you."

Wilmot became profusely apologetic and penitent, but Hartley was long in being soothed. He had been badly hurt on his most sensitive point, and declined all explanation. He called up Smeer. "Johannes, do you think I mean what I have said to you?" he demanded.

"Why, surely, Mr Hartley, you always speak true words." He looked from one to the other, wonderingly.

"I want my friend here to bear witness, so that if anything should happen to me he will know what I have promised."

He repeated in English the terms of his undertaking to Smeer.

"Now swear that you'll see that I carry out my promise," and he framed the customary oath familiar

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to Afrikanders. Wilmot repeated it with his right hand raised. "Are you satisfied now?" Hartley asked.

"Quite, but there was no necessity for this."

"You made the necessity. You see other people trust me." Hartley lit his pipe in the usual bungling style, and walked away to cool down.

Half an hour was occupied in the process. Then he came up to where Wilmot was lying under the waggon, and, squatting beside him, gave him an account of the trip to the kraal.

"It's all right," said he, "'Mpfeu is drinking heavily, but his induna, Bulalie, is keeping a strong hand over affairs of state, and will see us through."

"Did you see the diamonds?" Wilmot inquired eagerly.

Hartley looked hard at him.

"Man, but you are a doubting Thomas! Yes, I saw the diamonds, though I didn't ask to. What is more, I have selected those I want, and I reckon there are twenty thousand pounds' worth, or I am no judge of stones."

"I suppose there is no fear of the old savage going back on his bargain—refusing to pay when he has got the gun?" Wilmot put the question hesitatingly.

"Do you think I should have taken all this risk and trouble on an off-chance? No, sir, you may believe it or not, but I would rather take the bare word of a raw Kafir in a business like this than the sworn declaration of any white man I know." Hartley answered with a fierceness that completely decided Wilmot that he

would not again give expression to any doubts he might have. He watched with mingled admiration and astonishment the bold and unhesitating manner in which Hartley displayed to the induna the evidence of the keeping of his part of the bargain.

Smeer took the three Kafirs for the wheel early next morning, and returned with it before noon the following day. The journey was resumed that evening by the light of the moon, and for the first time for a week Wilmot slept peacefully.



CHAPTER XIV.

A DECADENT CHIEF.

WILMOT's first view of the kraal which had been the headquarters of the truculent and fearless Magato, but now the home of his unworthy weakling son 'Mpfeu, was disappointing in the extreme. He had listened with intense interest to the stories of the first visit of Hartley and Adam M'Queen, and had filled in the unrecorded details with the colour of imagination, for it is rarely that South Africans can satisfy the natural craving of the new-comer to know something more than their bald matter-of-fact narratives convey. He had pictured a native village of clustering huts, of a guileless unclad swarm of natives engaged in their primitive but useful avocations, and, in the royal kraal, something approaching that barbaric splendour which tradition associates with the semi-savage chieftain in his own stronghold.

'Mpfeu's kraal consisted of less than a dozen grass-built beehive huts, differing no whit from any other of the scores Wilmot had seen on the journey up, and even on the outskirts of the mine near Krugersdorp. Three or four Kafirs lay about doing nothing



in particular, and apparently too destitute of curiosity and energy to recognise the arrival of white men beyond staring at them. A few girls and women paused in their sluggish tasks to inquire of the induna what the invasion meant; but Bulalie was the only representative of the royal circle who proffered any greeting. Like most Transvaal Kafirs he spoke a little of the Taal, and advancing to Hartley, informed him that 'Mpfeu was too sleepy to see him that day. In the meantime, would he outspan and take possession of the hut devoted to the use of visitors?

Hartley declined the offer. He knew too much of the horrors of a native hut, reeking with smoke and the dirt of a generation, and lighted only by the forty-inch aperture that did duty for door and window. He told Bulalie that he and his friends preferred to live in their waggon, but accepted the green mealies and Kafir beer brought by one of the royal wives.

"Is this the village?" Wilmot asked, disgust and disenchantment in his voice, as soon as they got under the shelter of the waggon-tilt.

"Village? Surely you know there's no such thing as a Kafir village in South Africa?" Hartley answered. "A tribe occupies a large district, not a small spot. Look there, and there."

He pointed in various directions up and down the valley. Wilmot saw three or four clusters of huts, varying from two to half-a-dozen, each group separated by a mile or more from the other. Hartley explained the family system prevailing among the Kafirs. "These Magatese occupy about a thousand square miles," said

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he, "and their huts are scattered as you see them. This is the royal kraal, and nobody comes to it but the head men of the different kraals, and then only when they are sent for. 'Mpfeu is sleepy; that means he is either getting drunk or sober. If he is starting a drunk, we are booked for a week before we shall see him; if he is tapering off, he will be fit in a day or two. Meanwhile we'll get the gun off-loaded."

Bulalie was appealed to for assistance. He despatched a Kafir to the nearest kraal, whence came, in the course of an hour, four or five able-bodied but flabby-muscled natives, who were given over to the charge of Golosh, and initiated into the business of removing the timbers from the waggon. A couple of English labourers would have completed the off-loading easily in half an hour. By that time the Magatese had lifted off three timbers and deposited them on the ground at the tail of the waggon, where they impeded further work. So the party sat down and took snuff for a quarter of an hour. They would have returned to their toil then, but two girls came out of a hut and sat by them. Politeness forbade leaving them unentertained, with the result that the off-loading was postponed for half an hour longer. By that time the sun was within half an hour of the distant peak, whence it disappeared for the night. The labourers had nearly a quarter of a mile to walk to their kraals, so started homewards, one of them intimating that some of the party might return to complete the job in a day or two after a beer drink was finished at one of the kraals.

Hartley watched their departure with anger and disgust written large upon his face.

"There's a sample of civilisation for you," he remarked. "In the old chief's time they dared not have sat down to snuff without permission, much less quit work. But this blackguard 'Mpfeu has been got hold of by civilisers. Look at the result! He is most of the time drunk, and all discipline is gone. I don't believe there's a manly Kafir left in the tribe. They'll be wiped out presently by the Boers, who dared not put their noses over the mountain in Magato's time. Man, but he *was* a chief—the sort of chap you read about, but rarely see. He was a man. It's hard to believe he should have a son like this. If Kafir ghosts walk, as these fellows believe they do, the old boy must spend the nights groaning. I hope this blessed gun will burst and blow 'Mpfeu to blazes."

Next morning Golosh and the two Kafirs completed the off-loading before breakfast, without outside help, and by noon the gun was fitted.

Hartley put in a belt and prepared to apply the all-important question, Would it work? He trained it on to a hill distant a thousand yards, and turned the handle; an ear-piercing rattle followed, and a small cloud of dust rose from the side of the kopje. Hartley turned the muzzle right and left, up and down, till the belt was emptied.

"Good old Adam! He's earned his money," was his only comment.

The reverberations had barely ceased to echo among the craggy rocks that surrounded the spot, before

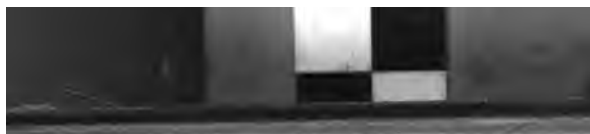
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natives came pouring out of the distant kraals, running towards the gun where the smoke still lingered. Bulalie came too, a smile on his otherwise unemotional face. He was an elderly man, with something of the dignity of command, and, as was afterwards proved, the only worthy wearer of the mantle of the dead chief.

"Good byemby?" he asked, using the name for a cannon whose origin has puzzled philologists since the Zulu war, and given rise to fifty explanations.

Bulalie stood well behind the Maxim, and without moving a muscle stolidly stared at it, beginning with the neat painted tripod on which it was mounted, and finishing with a hard scrutinising gaze at the polished brass muzzle. Then, without a word, he walked to the chief's kraal, and a quarter of an hour later came out with 'Mpfeu.

"Here's your civilised savage chief," Hartley remarked, and Wilmot looked and saw a tall Kafir intended by nature to be a shapely specimen of physical development untrammelled by the retarding influences of artificiality; but civilisation had triumphed over nature, and alcohol had undone in two years the work of generations. 'Mpfeu was a physical and mental wreck at twenty-five years of age. He had the halting, slouching step of an old man, fishy eyes surrounded by a broad arch of red, raw flesh, a limp underhanging jaw, drooping shoulders, and a body covered with loose flabby skin. The only sign of his chieftainship was the royal leopard skin tied loosely round his waist, with the tail drooping between his



legs. He was naked from the waist up, and his attenuated calves were concealed by a pair of leathern leggings of the latest English military pattern. His ornaments were a couple of brass-wire bangles round each ankle, and a lady's plain gold bracelet on the left wrist. He walked with a stick, the length of a billiard cue, bound with brass and copper wire, and carried in his left hand a silver tankard.

He halted a few feet from the gun, gave a nod of recognition to Hartley, stared at Wilmot, and glared at Smeer, whose obviously Boer appearance was too suggestive of his natural enemies to be pleasing.

Bulalie directed his attention to the gun. 'Mpfeu turned his oily eyes upon it, and stood leaning on his stick in apathetic silence while his induna explained.

"He wants to see it fired," Bulalie interpreted, when 'Mpfeu had interrupted the lecture by a half-whispered monosyllable. To speak in a whisper is one of the privileges and signs of royal dignity, the only one that 'Mpfeu preserved, and that because raising the voice required an effort.

Hartley fed the gun with a belt of cartridges, and was about to use the kopje as a target when 'Mpfeu whispered again.

"He wants to see oxen killed," Bulalie explained.

The half-dozen indunas standing round showed signs of excitement. They knew that the victims of the experiment would be taken from their own herds, and they protested. The indaba was long and noisy, and ended in the chief consenting to the substitution

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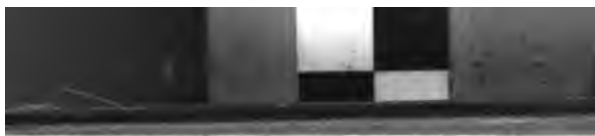
of a flock of goats. Kafirs were sent to the neighbouring kraals to levy the royal tax, and Hartley took advantage of the interval to produce the case of a dozen bottles of gin he had brought as a present to the chief.

'Mpfeu's face showed the first sign of interest and animation when the bottles were exposed. He signed to his indunas to carry them to his hut, and thither he slouched to sample the gift.

"I reckon I've postponed this show for a day or two," Hartley remarked when, the goats having been driven to the side of the kopje and the fact intimated to the royal drunkard, Bulalie came out to suggest a wacht een beetje (wait a bit).

"He's drinking alone," remarked Hartley. "Doesn't even invite me to have a tot of my own liquor. Sure sign that a man, black or white, has gone under when he drinks alone. Never knew it fail. Man, when I've been by myself in camp I always gave a tot to my Kafirs to save my own skin. Never drunk alone in my life. Reckon every drink I've had in this country cost me the price of two. If it wasn't for spoiling the deal I'd go and collar my share." And Hartley relieved his feelings by smothering them behind his efforts to light his pipe.

It was near sundown when 'Mpfeu reeled out of his hut, supported on each side by an induna, and accompanied by four of his wives, young girls on the border-line of twenty, but carrying the signs of premature age, brought on by the ill-treatment of their royal spouse.



Just before the arrival of the visitors one of the wives had perpetrated a scandal, unprecedented in the history of the court. She had run away to her father. Twenty years before, such an act would have ensured the destruction of her parents' kraal, and the prompt knobkerrying of the recaptured deserter; but 'Mpfeu had learned something of civilisation, and showed his annoyance in a more refined manner. He had merely taken back from the father the twenty oxen paid for the girl, put a dog-chain round her neck, and kept her for a month fastened to the pole of her hut, sending in the other wives every other day to express the royal displeasure with a sjambok. As the girl's chief grievance had been the too lavish use of liquor by her husband, he ingeniously reminded her of it by forcing a bullock-horn into her mouth and pouring down it as much gin and whisky as he could spare. Hartley was informed by the induna who told him the story that the treatment had completely overcome her conscientious scruples against the use of alcohol, and she had not uttered a word against whisky since the sixth and last application of the corrective, which was satisfactory, as it prevented the waste of much good spirit. Under the old heathen *régime* she would have been given no opportunity for recantation, but would have died in her obstinate bigotry.

The goats, to the number of about twenty, had been herded on the side of the kopje, at a distance of about seven hundred yards, and after much shouting the herd-boys got the animals in a crowd and ran

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out of the way. Hartley sighted the gun carefully and turned the handle. The disconcerting rattle brought shrieks of alarm from the women, and, a few seconds later, a chorus of admiring "ow's" from the men. The goats had been mowed down. Half a dozen, sorely wounded, were scrambling away on broken limbs, and, in mercy, Hartley gave them what remained of the cartridges in the feed-belt.

'Mpfeu looked on as apathetically as ever, the only sign of interest being excited when the Kafirs laid before him for inspection three mangled carcasses. "Ask the white man what he wants," he whispered to Bulalie.

The induna interpreted.

"The white stones I saw the other day : I'll take them now," was Hartley's curt reply.

The chief was led back to his hut, Hartley and his companions following.

Bulalie put his hand on the shoulder of Johannes Smeer.

"You may not come," said he in the Taal. "No Boer goes into the chief's kraal."

Hartley was confirmed in his surmise that the mantle of Magato had fallen on to the shoulders of the old induna. It was a saying of the dead chief, "When a Boer enters my hut he will stay there."

The moment Smeer felt the hand of the induna on his shoulder, the innate hatred of his race for the Kafir asserted itself. He flushed through his grey, parchment skin, pushed Bulalie aside, and elbowed his way through the women and indunas, who made way for



him. He stood for a few moments inside the door, then squatted defiantly on a mat.

He had unconsciously fulfilled the prophecy of the last three rulers of that tribe. Two years later a Boer commando entered and burned that hut, and drove the wreck of a dynasty to die the death of a broken drunkard in the fever swamps of the Limpopo. With the aid of his attendants 'Mpfeu was dropped into a squatting position on the ground. His leggings were removed, and a soldier's scarlet tunic put on him as protection against the flies that swarmed in the hut.

The process of settling down into a satisfactory position occupied considerable time, and when one of the wives presented a bottle of gin he raised it with the trembling slowness of a man in the last stages of alcoholic breakdown, took a big gulp, then passed it back to be emptied into a calabash from which he took a second drink and passed it towards Hartley, who took it, drank fairly and squarely, and passed it to Wilmot, whispering, "Don't shy at it,—drink." Wilmot obeyed, then held the tankard, hesitating whether to pass it to the Boer. Smeer noticed the act.

"Afrikanders don't drink with Kafirs," he said viciously, but fortunately in English.

"Shut up, you fool; you'll get no diamonds if you make a row," Hartley interposed without turning his head. He was squatting on the ground a few feet in front of 'Mpfeu, and watching every movement that was taking place among the indunas. Wilmot was observing too, and but for the placid unconcern on

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Hartley's face he would have been startled when Bulalie laid across his own knees a rifle.

"See that," said Hartley, addressing Smeer in English. "There's one of your Government guns. Look at the mark on the butt, 'Z. A. R.' Boers run guns as well as Rooineks, eh?"

Before Smeer could reply, Bulalie handed to 'Mpfeu a tin box such as is used for biscuits.

"These are the stones—keep quiet," Hartley whispered.

'Mpfeu slowly removed the lid, and poured out upon the straw mat about a pint of white stones, varying in size from a pea to a marble.

"Tell the white man he may take one handful," he said to Bulalie.

The induna interpreted. Hartley spread his open hand, as if measuring its capacity, and hesitated, then took off his big smasher hat, laid it crown downwards before him, rubbed his palm on the muddy floor, and placed it gently over the heap of stones, pressing them into the smallest compass. He kept his hand stationary for the space of half a minute, then with a quick easy motion raised it, and dropped the stones into his hat.

"Man, but I could have grabbed twice that lot," exclaimed Smeer, who had got upon his feet on hearing the instructions interpreted, and stood stooping over Hartley.

"If the Boer had not been here you should have had two hands full," said 'Mpfeu; "but one handful is enough for him to steal."

Bulalie interpreted, stolidly. The old Boer glared savagely, and was about to reply, when Hartley sprang up, seized him by the shoulder, and bundled him out of the hut. He returned, picked up his hat, and cramming it into his capacious side pocket, walked out. Smeer was just stooping to re-enter, his face livid with passion. Hartley grasped him by the arm and pulled him towards the waggon.

"Say a word, and I'll brain you. Haven't you sense enough to see that you are pepper in the eyes of these Kafirs? Get out of sight into the waggon and I'll give you your share," and Hartley lifted the little man on to the tail-board as if he had been a sack of mealies.

The three men sat together under the tilt. When Hartley had succeeded in soothing the outraged feelings of Johannes by explaining that he had acted as he had in order to prevent the old man from spoiling the business by resenting the insult of the chief, he proceeded to count and estimate their treasure. The stones numbered nearly three hundred, and ranged from six to fifty carats apiece, though most of the larger stones had eluded the grip and filtered between the fingers. However, about twenty of the best had fallen into the hat, and, after making allowance for faulty stones, Hartley decided that his original estimate of twenty thousand pounds' worth was not extravagant.

"And now, Johannes," said he, "will you take your stones now, or will you wait till we can turn them into money?"

There was no hesitation about the reply—

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"I'll take my share now."

There was some difficulty in appraising five hundred pounds' worth; but with time and patience, and much objection and jangling, twenty stones were apportioned to the old man, who declared himself satisfied—as well he might, for their value was much nearer a thousand pounds than the amount promised.

"Are you sure you're satisfied?" asked Hartley with obvious irony.

Smeer turned the stones over in his dirty hat.

"Yes," he answered dubiously, "I think the diamonds may be enough; but when do you pay me for the waggon?"

Hartley looked up suddenly, as if he had been struck. His face became contorted with passion, and Wilmot felt an apprehensive thrill of approaching danger. Hartley's mouth opened convulsively, but no words came; then, just as Wilmot had nerved himself for a torrential outburst of profanity, Hartley shook his head gravely and remarked in a tone of mild reproach, "You greedy rascal!"

He lighted his pipe and puffed away the passion he had restrained, while Wilmot expressed his sense of relief by a burst of laughter.

"Man, I came near slaughtering him; but I couldn't lose my temper after punching him for getting qwaart with that Kafir," was Hartley's apology for his restraint. He turned to Smear. "I'll pay you for your waggon," said he; "and I'll tell Clarie that if she marries you, she'll have to pay you for her board and lodging."

"Nay, Mr Hartley, that would be wrong; I would not charge her anything," the old man replied with childlike earnestness.

Hartley and Wilmot lay long awake under the waggon-tilt that night, arranging plans for the safe bestowal of the treasure. Hartley had already given the matter some thought; but the unexpected inclusion of Smeer into their partnership and secret necessitated a rearrangement. The folly of putting all their eggs into one basket was to be avoided by distributing the stones as much as possible.

To the ordinary man there would appear no difficulty in hiding a number of small pebbles that would not fill a teacup; but precautions had to be taken against the very probable contingency of a search by persons who had learned in Kimberley the difficult art of hiding and finding. Hartley had never been in Diamondopolis, but, like all old Randites, he was familiar with the thousands of stories of diamond smuggling, whose colossal ingenuity was only equalled by the almost supernatural penetrativeness of the most perfect and far-reaching detective system the world has yet known—a system nurtured and developed by all the resources of unlimited wealth, and the use of state-aided machinery that, like a valuable invention, was daily strengthened and amplified by the best brains that money could command.

Hartley told strange stories that night which amazed his astonished listener; for though many such narrations have passed into the list of stock yarns, the best are generally left untold to new hands,

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as they demand a degree of faith that is near akin to childish credulity.

One of Hartley's earliest experiences was the nursing of a camp acquaintance who had been reduced to a condition of repulsive and Job-like corruption through carrying valuable stones in suppurating ulcers about his body; and he knew well the famous illicit dealer who had run the gauntlet of Kimberley detectives with five thousand pounds' worth of stones concealed beneath a hideous scalp wound. The invention of new hiding-places seemed to have reached its limit, and those that occasionally succeeded were but variants on old tricks that escaped notice because of their antiquity.

It was on this hypothesis Hartley intended to work. The two partners were to carry as many of the more valuable stones as they could conceal on or about their persons; the bulk were to be hidden in the most conspicuous object on the waggon—the brake-block. This is a piece of wood about two feet long and six inches square, that presses against each hind wheel of the waggon by the action of a screw. An augerhole was to be bored in each, the diamonds inserted, and the holes plugged with wood. As the block was always coated with mud, any sign of the boring and plugging would be obliterated. Another advantage lay in the very important fact that, if occasion arose, the blocks could be detached, thrown carelessly aside, and left in safety—for a discarded brake-block, like a leaky kettle, was worth neither destroying nor using, and might lie about the farm

for years; and further, it was not too bulky for easy transport. As Hartley pointed out, in the old days the waggon was a common hiding-place, and he had known the Kimberley detectives cut one into two-inch pieces in their quest for a valuable parcel of stones; but no one who knew his business would suspect an old hand like Hartley of resorting to such a primitive and played-out hiding-place.

They had ample time for the perfection of their plans. The exhausted oxen needed, at least, a week's rest, and the old waggon required much patching and repairing after the strain of the journey. The secreting of the dozen large stones the two men had decided to carry with them was not so easy a task as the disposal of the bulk, and provided material for many serious discussions. Hartley at last hit upon a device which was adopted. He had purchased from one of the indunas a genuine sjambok,—not the imitation thing of ox-hide, but the rare and valuable article made of rhinoceros skin, about thirty inches long, and tapering from three-quarters of an inch to a slender point. With infinite pains he hollowed out six inches of the thick end, inserted ten diamonds, and paid a Kafir, with a pocket-knife, to bind the end with brass wire, after the fashion in which the natives ornament their knobkerries and sticks. Wilmot purchased a similar sjambok, and when complete the men carried probably the most valuable riding-whips in the world, for they contained at least two thousand pounds' worth of diamonds apiece. Next to their clothes a sjambok was the closest accessory to their

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persons: it is as much a part of an Afrikaner's equipment as his boots. There was only one weak point about the scheme that Hartley could detect. A sjambok of genuine rhinoceros hide might tempt many a man to petty larceny; but, on the other hand, its obvious value would supply excuse for retaining it in the hand when it might otherwise be put down.

The diamonds were successfully inserted into the brake-blocks by Hartley one day when Smeer and the Kafirs were away looking after the oxen; and by way of throwing the old man off the scent Hartley made two small leather bags, filled them with pebbles, and he and Wilmot wore them tied inside their belts. Johannes had carried his treasure in the puggaree round his hat, but on seeing the expedient adopted by his companions, he imitated it, making a point of counting the stones before and after going to sleep, which was four or five times during the twenty-four hours.

Wilmot killed the time of waiting by watching the natives. He had all the newcomer's curiosity about their manners and customs. Hartley had been abandoned as a source of information; for, like most South Africans long in the country, he was unable to conceive how any white man could feel interested in the ways of Kafirs, and dispensed his very large stock of knowledge with grudging impatience and parsimony. When Wilmot appealed to Golosh, that superior product of civilisation announced in the most lofty manner that he knew nothing about dirty niggers.

Thrown, therefore, upon his own resources, Wilmot tried to pick up knowledge at first hand, and succeeded, in spite of his inability to hold converse with the subjects. He was fortunate in being the witness of the picturesque if long-drawn ceremonial of a Kafir wedding, and the less edifying spectacle of a beer-drink, with its attendant scenes of disgusting repletion and quarrelling; but when he had seen the slaughter of an ox by the barbarous native method of spearing the animal and chasing it round till it dropped from loss of blood, he cried enough, and avoided prying further behind the veil.

Eight days after their arrival Hartley and Wilmot attended Bulalie on a leave-taking visit to the hut of 'Mpfeu. His majesty handed round the gin-bottle, instructed his induna to convey his satisfaction with the gun, and curled up to sleep with his head on the lap of a wife.

Hartley presented Bulalie and the chief indunas with the snuff he had brought for the purpose, and at sunrise next morning the homeward trek began.



CHAPTER XV.

THE CURSE OF THE DIAMOND.

COMPARED with the outward journey, the return was paradisiacal. The oxen had benefited as only South African cattle can by the week's rest and the good grass, and pulled the rattling old waggon with an ease that emphasised more acutely the terrible nature of the load that had been discharged. The autumnal weather, too, was idyllic. When the morning mists, that in these mountainous regions curtain the sun for two or three hours after its rising, had disappeared, the bright attenuated air exhilarated the travellers and filled them with an ebullient vitality, that vented itself in wild and superfluous canters ahead whenever a piece of suitable country presented itself. Before the first day's trek was ended even Johannes Smeer had developed a new and unguessed phase of character. The taciturn old Boer had become a babbling juvenile. He gave an imitation of the yells and cries in comical Dutch of a Hottentot ox-driver, and made no protest when the Kafirs laughed at him; sang the refrain of "Kaatje Kettlebank"; and, after the style of the variety artists of the music halls, gave a further



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illustration of his versatility, principally by cutting off the heads of veld flowers twenty feet off the path by a dexterous swish of his waggon-whip, following the display by a narration of his prowess in the art of cutting off the heads of puff-adders with the same weapon.

When the waggon was outspanned for the night he joined his companions round the fire for the first time, and badgered Hartley with a torrent of questions as to the value of the diamonds, the best way of turning them into cattle, and the probable effect the sight of them would have on Clarie. He counted them a dozen times, polished them in his mouth, and generally comported himself like a child with a new toy.

Hartley was complacent and good-tempered. He answered the old man's questions, employing the Taal, and when temporarily embarrassed for a suitable word or phrase floundered round till he found it, instead of, as was his wont heretofore, damning the Taal as the language of baboons, and useless even to swear in.

As Smeer examined his diamonds he expressed thoughts that had occurred to many a more philosophical mind. "I can't understand why you Rooineks should set such store on these little white stones," said he. "Man, but you Englanders are foolish in some things. Why did you not take cattle instead? Did you not see those beautiful little Zulu oxen?" And the old fellow launched out into a homily on the folly of the Transvaal Government in

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allowing Kafirs to possess such excellent cattle, and land that he was convinced was better than anything in the Republic. He did not know that at that very time the Pretorian Executive was listening with approval to precisely the same arguments, urged by more eloquent but less disinterested advocates of territorial expansion, and that a campaign was being mapped out by the General who, ten years before, had been snubbed by the father of the weakling chief who was to be the last of his line.

Provisions were by this time running short, and even the ascetic Johannes was disposed to grumble at the monotonous reappearance of mealie porridge in every bill of fare. They had obtained a little fresh goat-meat at the kraal, but the luxuries that make life on the veld a pleasure were all but exhausted, and longer and faster treks became necessary.

The return journey was being made over a more direct route, the need of circuitous avoidance of the main road no longer existing. By way of facilitating progress old Johannes would ride ahead a few miles to reconnoitre the track, a precaution that saved many hard pulls over bad ground. On the third day he returned from his scouting leading a good horse. He explained that he had found it grazing and hobbled. Concluding that some waggon was outspanned in the district, he had ridden to a hill commanding an extensive view of the country, but saw no sign of other travellers. His veld-craft had satisfied him that the horse belonged to an Englishman, because a Boer or Kafir would have restrained the animal with a



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knee-halter instead of a hobble; further, that four or five days had passed since the creature had strayed from its camp.

Wilmot noticed that the incident disturbed Hartley, for he became very thoughtful, and hurried off the old man next day with instructions to make a thorough search for evidences of white men being in the neighbourhood. Neither of the men was therefore surprised that Johannes should remain away till sundown. He reported on his return that he had seen smoke, apparently from a camp-fire, some miles distant, and had ridden up to it, to find an extinguished heap of ashes that had been scattered in a manner only compatible with a desire to remove as quickly as possible signs of smoke.

They talked the matter over very seriously that night. For the first time the old man gave evidence of apprehensiveness as to the issue. He declared that he was convinced they were being followed, probably by Government spies, and that even if they escaped them, they ran great risk on returning to the Rand, for, as he justly observed, their Kafirs had seen enough to know the illicit nature of the business, and would be certain to talk. He made one or two suggestions for closing the mouths of the natives. The one that found most favour with him was to the effect that he should receive a further share of the booty, which he would devote to the squaring of the Kafirs. Hartley saw in the proposal a veiled threat and an attempt at blackmail, and lost his temper. The old man metaphorically stiffened his



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back and took Hartley's attack standing, telling him that he considered himself inadequately rewarded for the risk and damage to his person and conscience ensured by being inveigled into participation in an illegal expedition, and wound up by boldly demanding more stones.

Hartley was furious, and only the intervention of Wilmot stopped him from settling the dispute in the forcible fashion adopted to confute Adam M'Queen's telling logic. Old Smeer at length became alarmed and, taking his blankets, went to the shelter of some boulders a couple of hundred yards from the waggon, lit a fire, and soothed himself with coffee. He did not return that night.

Hartley was awakened about sunrise by Golosh. "Come and look at Baas Johannes," he said with stolid indifference. "I think he's dead."

Hartley and Wilmot hurried out of the waggon and ran to the boulders. The two Kafirs were standing there looking at something on the ground. Curled up in the blankets lay the body of the old Boer, his eyes wide open, a splash of blood coagulated on cheek and matted beard. A slight examination showed that the poor old fellow had been murdered in his sleep. A large blood-smeared stone told how the deed had been accomplished, and the shirt and trouser-belt, cut and torn, revealed the object of the crime. He had been brained as he lay sleeping. The murderer had cut away the shirt in quest of something which a later search had discovered in the dirty blue pugaree. The muslin lay in the grass a



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few feet away, and near it a small diamond showed salt-white.

The two men spoke no word. Wilmot was appalled by the horror of the thing. Hartley, inured by long experience to the tragedies of the veld, was silent for another reason, and the first words he uttered when speech returned were, "What will Clarie think?"

When Wilmot had shaken off the sinking horror that held him passive in word and act for several minutes, the primordial hunting instinct asserted itself, and he began to look round for a clue to the murderer. There was little to find, and no mystery as to the manner of the deed. The ground all around the boulders was gravelly and stony, with clumps of long grass, but nothing that would receive and hold signs of the passage of a human being. While Wilmot hunted for spoor Hartley held an informal inquest, with the Kafirs as witnesses. They had nothing to tell that Hartley did not know equally well. They were asleep in their blankets when the old man went to his, and it was Golosh who discovered the body. Why he went to the boulders he did not explain, beyond the inference that he walked in their direction because it was to windward of the smoke from the newly made fire. He had heard nothing during the night, he said; but on second thoughts he did remember hearing one of the Kafirs get up. It was a cool night, inclined to be chilly, and they were huddled rather closer together than usual in the grass beneath the waggon. He was not certain which of the two Kafirs stirred, but thought it was Toli. Toli was a

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stupid-looking Natal Kafir. Hartley had never liked the look of him, which had been unfortunate for Toli during the whole of the trek. Hartley immediately submitted the frightened youth to a cross-examination. He began in the most conciliatory tone—

“Toli, I know you’re a big liar and a thief, and altogether a schelm. You’ve got to tell me the whole truth about this business of last night. Mind you, it’s tronk for you, and perhaps hanging; so mind you speak the truth.”

Hartley had many qualities that would have ensured for him an embarrassing popularity among the whites of Natal had he been a native magistrate in that colony. He always took it for granted that a Kafir was a schelm, ergo that he was always guilty; that the onus of disproof lay with the accused; and that the prosecution should have the benefit of any doubt. Nor was Dick Hartley singular in this respect: ninety per cent of the white inhabitants of South Africa would have endorsed his attitude, though perhaps they might not have been able to throw into their voice and manner as much expression of the prejudice they felt as Dick Hartley could and did while giving the scared Toli a practical illustration of an average Colonial’s conception of English fair-play when a Kafir was concerned.

It is perhaps unnecessary to say that before the examination had proceeded five minutes Toli had contradicted himself a dozen times on vital points, and generally made hay of his own case and established that of the prosecution. Hartley made Toli



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remove the instalments of shirt and trousers that formed his covering, and searched him for the hidden diamonds with all the thoroughness and physiological knowledge of a Kimberley detective. He found nothing, so, resolved to follow the matter up, he gave Toli two hours in which to return the diamonds or receive a sjamboking.

Meanwhile Wilmot's sleuth-hound tactics had not been fruitless. He had discovered several marks—faint, it is true, and requiring the illustrative comments of their discoverer to make them clear,—but it needed no expert to see that two footprints were those of a man wearing thick-soled boots of large size, and walking with a wide, slouching step. These marks had been left in two places on the hard ground where a little dust and sand had been blown. They indicated a man walking quickly from the scene of the murder into the grassy ground to the west of the track.

Despite his conclusions arrived at in the case of Toli, Hartley was compelled to admit that Wilmot's discovery was noteworthy. He decided to extend the time given the suspect, and informed him that the flogging had been postponed till next morning, as his services were needed for leading the oxen. He next dealt with the other Kafirs, and tried to elicit from them whether Toli had ever possessed or worn boots, and if so, where were they? He gave them half an hour to produce them. There was no time-wasting theorising about Hartley's method of dealing with Kafirs. He was thorough, and came to business on the spot. This was the explanation he gave to

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Wilmot when the latter pointed out one or two trifling departures from the accepted laws of collecting and judging evidence.

"It seems to me," said Wilmot, "that it would be more in accord with common-sense and justice if you and I let these Kafirs compare our footprints, for I don't know anybody else who wears boots in this community."

He spoke jocularly and ironically, for Hartley's absurd prejudgment annoyed him. He had not been long enough in the country to grasp the fact that Afrikaners have two standards of justice and arithmetic—one used for whites, the other exclusively for blacks. If Hartley had heard a man presuming the guilt of a white man before trial, he would probably have punched his head. If the same man had presumed the innocence of an accused Kafir, Hartley would have considered him too great a fool to waste even a punch on. When he heard Wilmot's suggestion as to the boots he became genuinely angry, and looked hard at his friend as if to discover his meaning. He recovered his balance and passed the remark over with a joke, walking towards the waggon.

As soon as Hartley was gone, the young man followed him slowly, keeping his eyes on the ground as if examining his tracks. He found one, more distinct than the others, and stood for several seconds gazing hard at it.

He was startled out of his study by the voice of Hartley. "We must get the old chap underground," said he.

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"Don't you think we ought to wait a bit?" Wilmot asked. He was uneasy. There was an absence of concern in Hartley, a disposition to treat the matter as an everyday incident. He was much more upset by the smashing of the waggon-wheel.

"What should we wait for?" Hartley replied.

"I don't know, but perhaps something might turn up. We haven't examined the body thoroughly yet. It might give us a clue to the murderer."

"Finding the murderer won't bring the old man to life, nor make the body more likely to keep in this climate. We have only one spade, so the Kafirs must scratch a shallow hole and cover it well with stones to keep off animals."

"What is your theory about this business?" Wilmot asked, as they stood superintending the grave-digging.

"Very simple,—Kafirs."

"Kafirs or a Kafir?"

"If there's one there must be two. Kafirs can't keep secrets. If they could, they'd wipe out us white men. Toli knows all about it."

"But what about the footprints?"

"Rather puzzling to a greenhorn, I admit."

Wilmot took the implied reflection to himself, and abandoned the subject.

When the hole was about three feet deep Hartley announced that the grave was ready.

"You and I will lift him into it. You don't know how a Boer hates the idea of having his dead body handled by a Kafir. I feel like that myself. Go and wrap him up in his blanket."

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Wilmot hesitated, and looked inquiringly at Hartley. "You have had more experience in this sort of thing," he said.

Hartley put his hand on Wilmot's shoulder. "Look here, old chap; you don't understand me. I can't play the hypocrite. I never liked the old man,—I hated him. You know why, and I can't humbug myself that I forgive him. See this thing through to oblige me. I'll help you to put him in, but I'm damned if I can do the praying over him. Just jerk off the Lord's Prayer when he's in, unless you know that part of the funeral service about 'ashes to ashes.' I ought to know it, Lord knows,—I've helped plant enough of 'em,—but I couldn't say it, even if I could remember it."

Wilmot said nothing, but moved towards the body. He wrapped the blanket decently around the contorted limbs. He had never before seen death. This, like all his first experiences in the country, was so unlike what he had imagined. He thought that a dead body lay straight, stiff, and even gracefully, with hands folded and eyes closed. This was a thing of horror,—a body with knees drawn up to the trunk, head twisted on to the left shoulder, and one arm half raised across the breast, as if in the act of warding off the blow that made the head and face a thing to keep one's eyes averted from. And then those staring open eyes! He thought of many things he had read of murderers and worse wrong-doers being haunted for the rest of their lives by the fixed, staring gaze of their victim, and he could understand it. He



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covered the face quickly, but those eyes still stared at him through the blanket. He signed to Hartley to help in carrying the body to its grave.

With the forethought of the man whose emotions are under control, Hartley had foreseen the necessity for a hole that should fit the shapeless corpse, and had given his instructions accordingly. The grave was nearly as broad as long, and held the body without the need of adjustment. When the blanket had been spread over the corpse Hartley signed to the Kafirs to throw in the earth, and walked away. Wilmot stood watching them. He wanted to say something like a prayer, but a sort of mental paralysis kept back the words; and Johannes Smeer's body, like that of many a hundred, was left in a nameless and unsanctified grave.

The two men spoke little together that day. Despite the apparent callousness he had exhibited over the body of the old Boer, Hartley was plainly much perturbed. Wilmot had not before seen such an expression of gloom upon the face of his companion, and he himself could frame no sentence that would be appropriate, so he held his tongue. He had suggested that the trek should not be resumed till the morrow, but Hartley curtly declared that he would not stay within sight of the grave. After midday the oxen were inspanned, and the driver's whip assumed by Golosh.

They missed the old man terribly, his quaint comments and resourceful captaincy. The oxen, too, knew that another hand had control. Golosh was

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no expert in the transport rider's art, and his many blunders and errors of judgment, which he visited upon the unfortunate cattle, provided Hartley with a safety-valve for the impulses that had been checked by the tragedy of the morning. They made poor travelling,—Hartley, riding on ahead to pick the road, leaving Wilmot alone with thoughts that were not of the brightest.

They outspanned early that afternoon to give the oxen a rest, in preparation for the hard work that awaited them at the crossing of a river next day. Hartley continued moody, and for the first time during the trip took a tot of whisky between the intervals that he had marked out and religiously observed since the day they left the farm. He also did another unusual thing: he joined Wilmot by the side of the camp-fire, and sat smoking in silence with his hands clasped round his knees. Presently he broke out impetuously—

"Wilmot, I believe I'm under some sort of curse. All my best things get frosted just as they are beginning to blossom. Look at this. Just on the point of marrying, and the girl is taken from me. It's rough, Wilmot, damned rough. And I've never done a creature a bad turn in my life."

"Taken from you—how?" Wilmot's tone expressed the genuine surprise he felt.

"How? How can you ask? Have you no brains? Do you think I can ever persuade Clarie that I did not kill Johannes?"

"Why on earth should she suspect you any more than me?"

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"You don't understand. I have said things. I can see them now. I talked murder, man, without knowing it. Then isn't she Afrikander, in spite of all her education? She would quite understand one of her own people doing it; why should she think differently of me? Fancy marrying a woman who in her heart believed you a murderer! I couldn't stand it, Wilmot."

Wilmot took in the position. "What will you do?" he asked for the sake of breaking the awful pause that had followed.

"Do? Go and face it, of course. What else can I do? I had thought of leaving Smeer to go on with the waggon while you and I pushed through to Delagoa Bay or Natal. I had fixed it up last night when I had figured out that we were being shadowed, and that old Johannes was likely to play dog. But it can't be now. You had better go and take the stones. I'll push on and learn the worst."

"No, Dick; we'll stick together," Wilmot answered. But there was not that ring of sincerity that should give tone to a determination so important. Hartley seemed to notice it.

"We won't talk to-night, Wilmot; neither of us is fit for it. I'm played out. If I were in town, it would mean a big drunk——" He checked himself. "No, not now; I should give my boots to the Kafir and go to bed. I'm off now."

"Toli has gone away."

This was the news with which Golosh awakened his baas soon after daylight.

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Toli had decided not to wait for the sjamboking. He had gone off over-night—at least, that was the theory of the other natives. They probably could have told all that was to be known, and would have, if Baas Hartley had applied pressure; but he showed no curiosity beyond expressing a desire to know whether the deserter had travelled towards the Rand or made for one of the native locations that swarmed to the eastward in the Lydenburg district. He was merely weighing up the probabilities of the boy meeting Boers and being frightened into saying something of the work in which he had been engaged. Toli would not be likely to volunteer anything in view of the charge implied against him by his baas; but Boers in outlying districts have persuasive methods with Kafirs.

Wilmot remarked the indifference of his companion. "If you think he had anything to do with that business, wouldn't it be worth while to ride after him?" he asked.

"A mounted man would have no chance of riding down a Kafir in this country," was all Hartley said.

They had no further opportunity of discussing a subject that had impressed Wilmot disagreeably.

Half an hour after the start the waggon crossed a river. It was wide and shallow, the bottom strewn with slippery water-worn rocks and stones, which extended for many yards beyond flood water-mark. Wilmot was riding ahead, and on reaching the opposite bank rode into the long grass, thinking to avoid the loose stones that were distressing his horse. A



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few yards from the river-bank the grass was saddle-high. Suddenly it was dashed aside by some large object that came rapidly towards him, but was concealed beneath the long tambouki. The horse reared, snorted, and swerved frantically, unseating his rider and throwing him heavily on his back among the stones. A huge iguana scrambled across Wilmot's body in mad flight to the water. It was a not uncommon incident. The creature, finding its road to the river intercepted, followed the habit of its species, and rushed blindly forward along its track, regardless of the obstruction. Its nauseous odour, like that of the water tortoise, has a peculiarly exciting effect upon horses; and doubtless the hideous appearance of the harmless reptile is as disturbing as the smell it gives out, for no horse has been known to face one, and few men regard it with equanimity on first acquaintance.

When Wilmot had recovered from the very excusable fright, he regained his feet with some difficulty and limped to the waggon, which had been halted to enable the voorlouper to recover the startled horse. He threw himself in the shadow on a tussock of grass and lay back, his hand on his loin and an agonised expression on his face. Hartley looked at him for a space without speaking, then inquired where the hurt was. Wilmot pressed his hand against the left side of his back for answer. Hartley passed his hands over the young man's body and pronounced an emphatic opinion that nothing serious had happened. Wilmot shook his head. Hartley repeated his assurance, add-



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ing a rough incitement to effort: "Pull yourself together, man. You've got to have many a tumble before you can ride in a country like this."

Any other person than a robust animal like Hartley must have recognised that Wilmot was suffering great pain, and that he was at least hurt internally; but the Yorkshireman had been brought up in a school that regarded no ailment seriously until it had proved fatal, and refused to believe any man was ill so long as he could raise an arm. Indifference to suffering, whether in man or animal, is the hall-mark of the man of the veld. As Hartley stood watching the contortions of Wilmot's face, he was in a half-pitying, half-contemptuous mood. He had much of the Colonial's contempt for the man who could not ride or jump up after a fall. He was satisfied that this tender offshoot of an effete town-bred civilisation was weakly giving way to a trifle. He must be brought round sharply with the veldman's panacea for all evils—a stiff dose of brandy. He poured nearly half a pint down the patient's throat. Veld physic is usually of the kill or cure order, and this specific came dangerously near the former. His next blunder took the form of an attempt to lift the man on to the waggon, but the groans and outcries compelled him to desist. Reluctantly he gave orders for outspanning the oxen, made Wilmot as comfortable with blankets as the roughness of the ground would permit, then lit up his pipe and sat in the shade to watch and wait developments.

Wilmot passed into drowsiness, then into uncon-

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sciousness. His hand now and then was passed feebly towards the seat of pain, but drooped before it reached it. Then came a succession of faint moans and an attempt to articulate. Hartley's scepticism began to yield to real concern. He had seen and nursed many a case of accident and fever, but never were the symptoms so puzzling as now. He exercised his memory of anatomy to suggest an explanation. He knew what a man looked like with an injured spine, a broken neck, and a bagful of fractured ribs, but this was none of them. He poured more brandy down the throat, producing a spasm of choking that satisfied him the back was not broken, for Wilmot sat up in his paroxysm. Then Hartley put a series of questions to the patient, but got only incoherencies. He smoked on in silence for half an hour. Suddenly he received a shock that brought the blood to his face. Wilmot had been muttering at intervals as if endeavouring to frame a sentence. At last it came, faintly muffled but horribly distinct—

"Why did you kill him, Dick?"

Hartley listened in thrilling suspense. There was a long pause; then came a feeble cry, "Poor old man! . . . Oh, Dick! murder, Dick!" Hartley got up and paced backwards and forwards excitedly, halting when he came opposite the recumbent figure as if expecting to hear something more, but Wilmot only muttered unintelligibly.

Golosh came up, and stood gazing wonderingly at the sick man. Hartley turned on him almost savagely. "Clear out of it; go and boil water." His tongue had

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been loosened by the outburst. "God, he believes it, and she will believe it! There's a curse on diamonds." And he joined his incoherencies to those of the delirious man, sometimes pacing up and down restlessly, at others squatting by Wilmot's side trying to make sense of his murmurings.

The day lengthened into afternoon, but Wilmot gave no sign of change. Hartley did. He had emptied the brandy bottle. Under normal conditions the quantity drunk would have but stimulated him, but now it accelerated the mental excitement caused by the horrifying discovery that his friend believed him to be the murderer of a harmless old man. He kept repeating as a refrain to his ejaculatory mutterings, "He believes it, she will believe it."

His tireless pacing was arrested by a sound from Wilmot, who spoke calmly and rationally—

"Water, Dick; quick!"

He hastened to give it. Wilmot drank thirstily. He had returned to consciousness.

"Do you know what you've been saying?" Hartley asked.

Wilmot gave a feeble negative. He was plainly still in great pain, dazed, and drowsy. Hartley made no further attempt to question him, but sat down and resumed his stolid watch, and thought. He looked the situation straight in the face, driving off with an effort of will, as hard drinkers often can, the brain-cloudiness that had for a time bemused him.

Wilmot was badly hurt—of that he was now quite convinced. His own ignorance of the exact nature



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of the injury rendered it the more imperative that he should procure medical aid. Had it been merely fever, or dysentery, or one of the twenty scourges of the veld, he would have known what to do, but he was paralysed in the awful presence of the unknown. Then they were short of food. Since leaving 'Mpfeu's kraal they had practically existed on mealie meal, and such trifles as sardines and tinned sausage. Even the condensed milk had given out, and of all things that a sick man most needed, milk stood paramount. There was nothing that he could do but ride into Pietersburg, the nearest dorp likely to possess a doctor. He dared not send either Golosh or the voorlouper, for he knew not what mischief their stupid tongues might cause. He consulted his map, and reckoned the distance at fifty miles by direction, probably eighty if the track proved bad and circuitous. Hard riding would cover the ground both ways in four days.

He decided quickly. He would take the voorlouper to carry the purchases, leaving Golosh in charge of the sick man. He gave the native instructions, and amplified them in a letter he wrote that Wilmot might read on recovering consciousness. There was one serious difficulty to arrange. The total cash in hand was less than five pounds,—barely sufficient to purchase necessary provisions. The doctor would not come out for less than £20: medical fees were high in the Transvaal, and cash in advance the rule when dealing with strangers. Hartley bethought him of the diamond Wilmot had found when searching for tracks of the

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murderer. It was a twenty-carat stone, and, if he could turn it into cash in the dorp, would provide ample means. It was a risky and dangerous experiment, but it must be tried.

He gave one parting look at Wilmot, waited a few minutes in the hopes of a brief interval of lucidity, but recognised that the hope was vain. An hour before sunset he and the voorlouper set out westward.

The journey proved a trying and tedious one. The region traversed being all but virgin, it provided neither food nor guidance; and when, after twenty hours in the saddle, they reached the little township that marks the northern limit of Transvaal dorpdome, the travellers were only a whit less exhausted than their horses. But fortune was attending them. At the little canteen that did duty as the leading hotel Hartley found a young doctor at billiards, and an old acquaintance in Tom Wilson, a well-known railway contractor, who was royally expending a large proportion of the money he had made so easily as a sub-contractor on the new Pietersburg-Pretoria railway. With the aggressive hospitality of his class when basking in the sun of fortune, he boisterously insisted on Hartley becoming his guest, and when the Yorkshireman bluntly explained his position, ostentatiously declared he would "stand treat to a doctor," which was his way of expressing his readiness to pay the medical man's fee. The mining man in luck is generally cited as a type of reckless generosity. He is a model of cautious parsimony in comparison with the South African railroad man full of cash and whisky.



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Hartley arranged with the doctor to start early next morning for a fee of £25, made his purchases, and gave the contractor an I O U for the £30 he had advanced. Wilson took it, read it aloud, then applied a match to it and called for a round of champagne.

The starting of a Boer commando was not more lingering and long-drawn-out than Hartley's departure. Wilson was in a humour of obstinately effusive friendliness, and sorely tried Hartley's temper and patience.

Thanks to the doctor's local knowledge, the return journey was accomplished with comparative ease, and the outspanned waggon was in sight within fifteen hours of the departure from Pietersburg. Hartley rode ahead, impatient to finish the journey. When the doctor arrived, ten minutes later, he found Hartley standing at the tail of the waggon, speechless, paralysed.

The sick man had disappeared! Two brake-blocks, hacked and split, lay, with the axe that had revealed their secret, on the ground beneath the waggon.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE DAY OF RECKONING.

It was some time before Hartley could control his riotous thoughts and fashion an intelligible theory. Then he was filled with a bitter sense of the base ingratitude of which he had been the victim. The explanation seemed clear and reasonable. Wilmot had recovered sufficiently to be able to travel, and, acting on the belief expressed in his delirium that his partner had murdered old Smeer for the sake of his diamonds, had yielded to fear and greed, and gone away with the treasure. The absence of the spare horse helped out this theory, as did the fact that the waggon had been denuded of food and several articles likely to be taken by men meditating a long journey.

But what about Golosh? Would not the presence of the native be an impediment to rapid travel, seeing they had but one horse, and that without saddle and bridle? Second thoughts lent strength to the original theory. Wilmot had taken the native, as he dared not leave him behind to give Hartley a clue to the direction of the flight. Besides, was not Golosh a christianised

Kafir, and therefore more likely to yield to the offer of a bribe?

The doctor had a theory that sounded practical. His suggestion was that Wilmot had wandered away in a fit of delirium, and that the native had gone in search of him. Hartley had not explained the damning significance of the sliced brake-blocks,—he dared not. When the doctor called attention to them, Hartley expressed his own puzzlement, lamely advancing as a solution the idea that the act had been prefatory to the construction of a new pair. The doctor proposed that after a short rest they should ride round in quest of traces of the fugitives. They at least might come upon a native kraal, where a clue could be obtained. Hartley yielded, more in response to his yearning for active employment than in faith of result.

They returned at sundown with broken-down horses but not a vestige of evidence.

The doctor slept soundly that night, but Hartley lay awake nursing his grief. The perfidy of Wilmot and the loss of the diamonds hurt him much, but they were trifles beside the one haunting horror of the effect of the strange catastrophe on Clarie.

For the first time the legal consequences of his supposed crime occurred to him. Suspicion could not possibly be averted. He realised to the full how black the case against himself was. How much blacker could it not be made by a Transvaal public prosecutor, when the victim was an oprecht Burgher of the State, the suspect a Rooinek who could be identified with

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gun-running? High treason and murder! The words thrilled him. There was but one chance of safety,—flight by way of Portuguese territory.

The doctor was kindly sympathetic next morning. He noted the signs of harassing worry and anxiety on Hartley's face, and tried to cheer him. It was pleasant to find a man so concerned about the fate of a friend, in a country where friendship was but a sordid matter of community of business interest. Like most men, he had taken a liking to Hartley at sight, and was prepared to do much to help him. He began by returning his fee. Hartley firmly refused it, but accepted the offer of the young surgeon's company on a final ride round.

They rode all that day. They found a Kafir kraal, but the natives had seen no white man, they said, or, if they had, had been bribed to silence. Hartley's instinctive distrust of the black race inclined him to the latter theory, and he began such a browbeating cross-examination that the subjects ended by running away.

This was all that he needed to confirm his opinion that they knew something. He did not tell his companion what he guessed, but declared his intention of staying with the waggon a few days on the chance of learning something, then trekking to the Rand.

Next morning the doctor started for Pietersburg. An hour later Hartley was adding a new and trying experience to his store,—that of driving a span of oxen over difficult and strange country with insufficient help. He was also treading a path even more difficult—the path of duty.



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The temptation to play the coward had assailed him only during the dark hours before the dawn. With sunrise came brightness of the day and clearness of brain, and a resolution to play the man and forget that he had ever thought of running away. He would risk arrest, trial, anything rather than that one woman should have cause to believe him capable of a crime so despicable as murder and flight.

It would be superfluous to describe the many disasters that occurred under conditions so favourable for them. The new brake-blocks, inefficiently and hurriedly made to take the place of the old, worked badly, and caused more than one slight accident; while the voorlouper, having the preoccupied mind of a novice like Hartley to control him, instead of the alert argus eye of the dead Boer, took the liberties that come instinctively to the Kafir with an easy baas, and added more than his fair share to the bungles and blunders of the trek.

Fifteen days after the death of Johannes Smeer, and thirty-three from the starting of the expedition, the waggon arrived at the boundary that marked the north-western limit of the Krugersdorp district. Two Boers suddenly rose out of the grass by the side of the track and approached, calling out "Stop!" One of them seized the reins by which the voorlouper guided the leading oxen, and roughly checked them.

Prepared for the worst, and anticipating arrest, Hartley came forward.

"Where do you come from?" he was asked.

"Pietersburg."



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"Then you cannot go on."

"Why not?"

"Do you not know that rinderpest has come into the land from the north? The Lord has sent it as a punishment for letting the Rooineks stay in the land."

During the absence of the expedition, rinderpest had appeared in the Transvaal, and a system of cordons had been established to protect unaffected areas. Hartley's cattle would not be permitted to cross the border until they had been certified clean. This meant a delay of several days. The farm of Piet de Villiers was less than three hours distant, and thither Hartley rode as soon as he had completed arrangements for leaving the waggon and oxen.

It was well after sunset when he reached the house. The usual chorus of barking from the dozen non-descript dogs gave the only sign of life: the house was silent and dark. A Kafir peeped out of the kitchen-boy's hut. Hartley called to him to take charge of the horse. At the sound of the voice the native first spoke to some one inside, then ran to the back of the house as if to raise the alarm. Hartley threw the reins over the horse's head—a sign that every South African horse recognises as an order to stand till called for—and went to the sitting-room door. He knocked once, then entered and called. The room was in darkness, but a slit of light from the kitchen door showed that some one was astir.

"Piet, come here!" Hartley called again.

The kitchen door opened, and Mrs de Villiers, slatternly and dirty, stood in the crack between door-



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post and door-edge. No Boer woman ever yet threw a door wide open in the presence of a stranger.

She gave a little scream on seeing Hartley and retired precipitately backwards, pulling the door after her, and took up the cry that had brought her into the sitting-room—

“Piet, come! Piet, come!”

Hartley sat on the sofa and quietly waited. He could hear voices whispering loudly, the shuffling of feet, and the sounds of a disturbed and excited household. A few minutes later Piet de Villiers, half awake and minus boots and coat, shuffled into the room. His vrouw came close behind, carrying a candle.

Hartley did not wait for the master of the house to open the conversation.

“Sit down, Piet; light your pipe and listen. I have a bad story to tell you.” He spoke the Taal.

Piet lumbered his big body into the nearest chair, and put his elbows on the table. Mrs de Villiers placed the candle by her husband and sat close against the wall, folded her hands, and looked Hartley up and down.

“It’s a bad story I have to tell, Piet. You must listen while I tell it all from the beginning. I must have time.”

“Ja, time to make up wicked lies,” Mrs de Villiers interrupted, in a tone of undisguised hostility. “Where is Johannes Smeer? Tell us that before you make lies. We know. You have murdered him. He was my cousin. You murdered him and stole his diamonds. We know. Toli has told us.”

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"It is Toli who lies," Hartley answered quietly, filling his pipe deliberately. "Johannes Smeer *was* your cousin. Do you think if I had done what you say I should have come back to you, his cousin?"

"Ja, you do it to make believe. You would do any wickedness and come and tell it. But you shall be caught. You shall go to tronk. Where are his diamonds?"

Hartley kept commendably cool. "Piet," he said, between the puffs of his pipe, "I have come to tell you my story. How can I tell it if she will not let me speak?"

Piet turned to the woman and made a gesture for silence. She turned fiercely on her husband.

"What! you would have me say nothing? You want to cover this schelm? You are glad Johannes is murdered. I will speak."

And she did. Both men smoked placidly during the storm till want of breath compelled a lull. Hartley took advantage of it.

"Yes, Piet; Johannes Smeer is murdered. By whom I know not. It was for diamonds. He was stone-crushed while he slept, and the diamonds taken from him."

"By you. You have the diamonds, you thief, you murderer!" the woman screamed.

"You are foolish, woman. Why should I kill Johannes for diamonds that I had given him, when I had a hat full? Does a farmer kill the ox for eating his grass?"

Through a gauntlet of interruptions and hysterical

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charges Hartley proceeded at a steady pace, ignoring the wife, and giving Piet a clear and perfectly straightforward account of the expedition. He admitted the gun-running, but said nothing of the attempt at blackmail by Johannes, or the disappearance of Wilmot.

"It is all lies! You fought Johannes to get back your diamonds, and drove him out of the waggon to sleep that you might murder him. Toli has told us all," Mrs de Villiers interrupted.

Hartley showed the first sign of temper.

"Toli says this, does he? Did he tell you that I accused him of the murder, and that he ran away because of fear?"

"Yes, fear of you; you were going to murder him. I know everything. And where is the young Rooinek? Why do you not bring him to tell lies? You know he will not bear you out. He is honest."

Hartley felt sick, and made no reply.

"Yes, where is Wilmot?—he will tell the truth."

Hendrika had entered the room, and stood by the side of her mother. She was in an elaborate dressing-gown, whose embellishment she had concealed and marred by throwing an old shawl over her head and shoulders. She stood an embodiment of inartistic incongruity,—delicate lace and ribbon, ragged and dirty woollen.

"Why did you make Wilmot bury Johannes?" she demanded. "We know,—you dared not look on him. It is always so with murderers. Have you murdered Wilmot? Where is he? Why does he not come to bear out your lies?"

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Hartley relit his pipe. The questioning of the girl unnerved and paralysed him. His courage was oozing. He wanted to be brave and conceal nothing, but he hesitated to make the answer that he felt must condemn him irretrievably. Where was Wilnot? He honestly did not know, but dare not confess it, much less could he put his suspicions into words. To impute treachery to his friend while he himself was under grave suspicion would be the act of a coward.

"You cannot answer," came the voice of Hendrika. "You know you have murdered him. I can feel it. Father, send a Kafir for Frickkie and Jan Smeer: they are on the farm, and must catch this schelm."

Old Piet spoke at last. He had been listening with the manner of a man who heard an excuse he could not accept. His stolid, stupid face had incredulity and obstinate scepticism stamped upon it. "You had better go away," he said. His passive, quiet-loving nature revolted at everything violent. He hated a scene, and would rather allow a malefactor to escape than have the trouble and exertion of arresting him.

"Run away before the Smeers come: they are waiting for you," he repeated.

Hartley started as if stung.

"Run away! By God, no! not for all the police in the Transvaal," he shouted, standing up and facing the group defiantly. "Where's Clarie? You may believe I'm a murderer, but she does not."

"Go away," Piet repeated petulantly.

"It's your house, Piet, but I don't go until Clarie tells me to."



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At that moment there was a flash of white at the door. Clarie, with a wrapper thrown round her, her long brown hair streaming over her shoulders, her face white as her robe and her dark eyes gleaming feverishly, glided noiselessly into the room. She walked swiftly up to Hartley, and pointing to the door that opened upon the stoep, said in a tone strangely at variance with her usual subdued and gentle speech—

“Go,—go at once!”

Hartley stood dazed and irresolute.

“But, Clarie, why should I go if I am innocent?”

“Go!” she repeated, and she put her hand on his arm as if to force him.

He looked at her for a space.

“I’ll go if you believe me a murderer.”

“I do,—go.”

“You do?” He asked the question with lingering, doubtful emphasis.

“I do,—go away.”

He picked up the sjambok that he had laid on the table, gave one long stupefied look at the white-robed, trembling figure, put on his hat, and passed into the darkness without a word.

Clarie stood, statuesque, till the door had closed behind him, then threw herself on to the sofa and burst into hysterical sobs.

Mrs de Villiers walked over and stood by her. “That is your Rooinek lover, eh?—a murderer; and you send him away that he may not be caught. But he will be. Hendrika, tell Toli to ride fast to Frickkie Smeer. Quick! I can hear he is going that way.”

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Hendrika left by the kitchen, and her mother followed. As she disappeared, a little figure in a dishevelled night-dress came furtively into the room and climbed on to the sofa, where she nestled beside the weeping woman. It was little Lisbeth.

Old Piet sat at the table watching the child fondling and kissing her sister. Presently he got up, slouched to the sofa and sat down. Clarie lay with her back to him, her face buried in a cushion. Her father gently pulled one hand away.

"Don't cry, haartje," he said soothingly. "Why did you tell him you thought him a murderer? I know you don't. But it looks black against him."

Clarie controlled herself with an effort. "It does look black," she said. "That's why I drove him away."

"But do you think he murdered Smeer?"

"I should have sent him away just the same."

"Then you don't think him bad."

She shook her head.

"You are a strange girl, Clarie. Why did you say you believed him guilty?"

"Father, you don't understand Dick. You heard him say he would not go but for me. If I had told him I thought him innocent, he would have stayed to be caught that he might justify my faith in him; but I know he would have no chance. They would convict him easily. It broke my heart to say it, but it was the only way,—I know him so well." And she broke again into sobs, while little Lisbeth lavished wet kisses and old Piet awkwardly stroked her hair, muttering, "Haartje, haartje!"



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Clarie had summed the incident accurately when she said she knew Hartley so well. Her strangely unexpected denunciation of the man was the outcome of a woman's instinct and impulse. She had heard her sister's threat to send for the sons of the dead Smeer, and knew well that it portended disaster for Hartley. Days before his arrival the family had heard the story told by Toli, and judgment had been given. Clarie had schemed to send Hartley warning, but her messenger had been intercepted, and threats of punishment had deterred any other Kafir from undertaking the task. She had been in bed some hours, worn out by anxiety and the torture of the incessant reproaches and taunts of her stepmother. The quick-eared sympathetic little Lisbeth had discovered the presence of Hartley in the sitting-room, and thither Clarie was proceeding when she heard him express his resolve to wait for the arrival of the avengers. She knew that he was in no humour to listen to remonstrance, even from her, and that his loyalty would impel him to scorn flight for her sake. A flash of instinctive reasoning showed her that she could destroy this motive by pretending callous indifference, even aversion. His question gave her her cue. His look and tone said plainly, "If you are against me, I yield." So she uttered the stinging words that fell upon his astonished ears as the sudden and unaccustomed lash startles the petted steed to the effort that averts the danger which gentle coaxing would but precipitate.

Piet looked on in silence for some minutes, then

have sent him away."

Mention of the Pred resistance. She had a days from the Predika The culminating crime to the uttermost all th that the young zealot painfully human, and se therefore could not resist tion. Clarie had at last burst of indignation, and ness as unworthy one p mention of him by her fa She turned and faced the

"Father, don't tell me He is no godly man. I me from—him, but he v knew all."

Piet looked surprised,

"You. haartie ? xxx"



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The old man stared at his daughter, then forced a laugh.

"You are very sick and bad, Clarie. Your head is light," and he stroked her hair.

She took his hands and looked him straight in the face.

"No, father, my head is not light. I know well what I say. It was I bade Hartley kill Johannes. Now do you understand why I sent him away?"

The old man was dazed.

"I do not understand, haartje."

"It is easy to understand, father. You know how I hated Johannes. Hartley knew it also. I told him how much I suffered, and he arranged to take Johannes away. Did he not break with you over the waggon that he might take Johannes? He did it because I wished it." She broke again into sobs, then, checking them, with a supreme effort she got off the sofa. "Father, you must help me. The Smeers will be here soon. I must write a letter to Hartley, and you must send Toli to find him."

She went to her room, and returned with a sealed envelope.

"I understand, Clarie; but she must not know." He took the envelope, and glanced fearfully in the direction of the kitchen.

Clarie put her arms round the old man and kissed him for reply.

"He must not be caught, haartje. I see it all very clear." He kissed her awkwardly, almost violently,

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quietly opened the door, and went out, shoeless, to the Kafir quarters.

He roused the herd-boy.

"Toli, get up quick. Saddle the blue schimmel and ride hard after Baas Hartley. Give him this, and when you have done it I shall give you a pound. Which way did he go?"

"He is gone Krugersdorp way, baas."

"If you find him I will give you another pound, Toli."

Clarie had followed her father to the hut.

"You have forgotten this," said she. She handed him a pass, without which no native can travel in the Transvaal under penalty of arrest. It ran—

"Pass my native, Toli, looking for his brother.

"Signed, P. DE VILLIERS,
"Rietspruit."

They waited until Toli returned from the paddock with the horse. He was hardly awake yet, and bungled the saddling. Clarie pushed him away, and tightened the girths.

"Now, Toli, ride harder than ever you did. Find the baas, and if you bring me an answer I will give you two pounds."

"I'll catch him, Missie," and the bare legs thrashed the horse's flanks viciously, sending him off at a fast triple.

When the two re-entered the sitting-room Mrs de Villiers was there.

"Where have you been? I heard a horse."

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"We have sent Toli to catch Hartley," Clarie answered as she passed into her room.

Thanks to the circumlocutory system of passing on orders in the de Villiers' household, Hendrika's instructions for the alarming of the Smeers had miscarried. She had shouted to the Kafirs from the kitchen door, but was not disposed to risk her dainty shoes by going outside to see that her orders were executed. The recipient of them had passed them on to the drowsy kitchen-boy, who had in turn shifted responsibility to a third, who did not act till he heard the voice of Baas Piet rousing Toli. Then he watched the saddling up, and returned to his blankets, where he would have remained had not Mrs de Villiers, vrouw-like, demanded full details as to the horses and messengers sent. When she learned the facts, she squandered valuable minutes in abusing Piet and Hendrika, and visited the natives' hut, where her tongue, and sjambok soon had things stirring.

Within an hour the two married sons of the dead Smeer arrived, accompanied by a neighbour, all carrying their rifles, and obviously relieved to find that the Rooinek was not waiting to give battle. They waited while coffee was prepared.

"Which way has he gone?" they asked.

"He is making for Mafeking," said Piet. "The road is good for you but bad for him. His horse is done up."

Two hours after Hartley had departed eastward, his pursuers started in the opposite direction.

Old Piet remained on the stoep till the sounds of

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hoofs satisfied him that the chase was off the scent. He slipped quietly into his daughter's room.

"Sleep well, haartje," he whispered, kissing her ; "your old father has sent justice on a wrong spoor."

"Justice, father? Justice will always be on the wrong spoor while it follows him."

And she buried her sobs in the pillow.



CHAPTER XVII.

FLIGHT.

WHEN Hartley rode off the homestead, the horse followed its instinct and headed for its home at Smeer's farm. Unchecked by its rider, who sat mute and listless in the saddle, it broke into a triple, which it increased to a canter as it recognised familiar landmarks, and in half an hour was at the broken fence that served as gateway to the Smeer residence. The stoppage of the animal brought Hartley to his senses, and he started violently as he recognised that he had been brought to the door of the cause of his life's tragedy. With a violent jerk at the reins he pulled the surprised and unwilling beast back on his track, and with a cut of his heavy sjambok sent him careering madly over the veld, in what direction he neither thought nor cared, so long as he felt active motion. Up till then he had been in a half-dazed condition,—a state that he had known on more than one occasion when his impulsiveness had landed him into an exchange of blows with some quarrelsome companion of a spree, and his opponent had proved the more scientific performer. He had received the greatest knock-



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down blow of his life, and the strangeness of the experience unfitted him for realising it. The encounter with the obstinate horse thoroughly awakened him, and after five minutes' hard galloping, which had almost taken the last bit of energy out of the exhausted animal, he steadied up into a walk, and began to put into form the emotions that were inchoately struggling within him.

"She believes it. Sent me away. Thinks I'm a murderer. I'm running away,—Dick Hartley running away!" he muttered, as men who lead solitary lives commune with themselves vocally. "Running away, and I said I wouldn't." He checked his horse. As the noise of his hoofs on the hard ground ceased he heard another sound. A horse was coming rapidly out of the blackness behind. A thrill of something, less like fear than a desire to avoid men, passed through him, and he urged his horse on. Without knowing it, he was on the main road that runs due east from Mafeking through Krugersdorp to Johannesburg,—the same road that Jameson had taken a few months before. Away to the left, embouching upon the road, was the deserted mine known to fame as Queen's Battery, from behind whose white heaps of tailing sand the Krugersdorp Burghers poured that deadly volley that made the raiders pause, and led to the fatal mistake that ended in disaster. At this very spot Jameson turned off into the veld to the right, and Hartley did the same. The idea dominant was to ride a few yards into the grass and allow the following horseman to pass along the road. But

once on the easy going of the level veld, the horse broke into its fast canter, which Hartley made no effort to check, for the motion was pleasant and fitted his turbulent thoughts. He could still hear the tripping patter of the other rider. Suddenly it ceased, and gave place to the hollow thud of heavy hoofs on hard, grassy ground. The rider had also turned off the road. A momentary glance around supplied the reason. Hartley had mounted a slight ridge, and his figure must be standing out against the faint glow in the western sky from the electric lamps on the mines at Krugersdorp. He was being pursued. Instinctively he jammed his heels against his horse, which broke into a tired, stumbling canter.

He was skirting the long marsh known as Prinsloo's Vlei,—the same that Jameson found barring his attempt to rectify the blunder that took him off the straight road. But the raiders had a setting sun to warn them of their danger; Hartley knew not that the dead grassy level to his left was a treacherous impassable bog, for in the pale glint of the stars it showed only its inviting surface, and gave no sign of the six feet of ooze the rich herbage covered. He turned his horse sharply towards it, for the path he was riding was water-worn and rugged. Next instant the animal was shoulder-high in the soft mud, and frantically plunging to free itself from the heavy man whose arms were choking its neck.

Of all the perils that attend the adventurous life of the veld, there are none that bring more acutely to a man the impotency of effort than that of the

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morass. In every other phase of stress and danger, action helps relief. Unexpected submergence in a swollen river becomes but a trial of skill and strength to the swimmer; the rider is stirred to pit his brain and nerve against the terror-stricken horse that dashes down some dangerous declivity; and the sudden attack of a savage beast can be triumphantly averted by alertness of hand and eye. But the victim of the encompassing morass can make no manly struggle with his fate, since striving but brings it nearer. The unopposing sludge yields only to wrap him closer in its paralysing folds; the slimy dampness chills his virility, and by freezing hope and effort, makes ready way for despair.

Hartley possessed in a large degree the priceless gift of quick resolve. The moment he felt the fore-quarters of the horse sinking, and heard the squidge of the mud, he realised his position and peril. He also knew the futility of violent effort. He relieved the horse of his weight as gently as he could by allowing himself to sink waist-deep into the ooze, and left the frightened creature to its own resources. He extended his arms sideways, and threw the weight of his body towards the bank, just visible in the dim light. There were about six inches of water overlying the sludge, and he knew its suffocating power was more to be feared than the spume and spray of a tempest-tossed sea. He paused for a minute to recover breath and balance, and to withdraw his legs from the suction that was pulling them into the partial vacuum caused by the plunging struggles of the horse. While he rested, the whole of the events of the past



few weeks flashed through his brain, clearly and sequentially, as the incidents of a lifetime are said to present themselves to a drowning man. Crowning them all came the soul-chilling thought,—this was a befitting end to his life's struggle with Fate. His plans and schemes, his honesty of purpose, the few less reputable actions of his career, had all ended in the morass of misunderstanding and unjust suspicion. The robust soul-cleanness that had prevented him making wealth by devious methods had been accounted to him for folly; his hatred of sham and fraud, that had impelled him to tell the truth of the worthlessness of enterprises in which he had been employed, had been set against him as the covert motive that prefaced self-interest; and the last cruel stroke had been administered by the only woman for whom he had cherished a pure affection. She deemed him a sordid murderer, and had ordered him from her presence! Truly the effort to live cleanly was as fruitless as his struggles against the all-conquering sludge. It was time for effort to cease, and why not now? He could at least die without reproach upon his physical courage, of which he had a strong man's pride, for the world—his world—well knew that a giant was but a babe in the embrace of the bog; and though there might be slur on the swimmer drowned in the stream or the fighter outfought, there could be no disgrace, no suggestion of feebleness, in losing a battle wherein the odds were so terrifically unequal. Drowning, he had heard, was a painless death even to the strongest.

1 [REDACTED]

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He turned as if to throw himself back into the hungry ooze. A glance at the horse showed its head was higher and nearer the bank. Mechanically he extended his hand to give it an encouraging flick. The animal responded with another effort and floundered towards a bed of reeds. Hartley threw himself forward as if to catch at the trailing reins. His hands came in contact with some reeds that held firmly. Cautiously, and without jerk or violent strain, he drew his body through the pasty mud till he could grasp with both hands a tussock. The action brought his chin down to the level of the water, and the fetid exhalation of ages of decay half suffocated him. To escape it, he constricted his body and threw it forward by relaxing the tension of his muscles. He felt his knee press something less yielding; then an elbow was arrested as it sank. He had struck a patch of ground compact with the roots of the reeds. Next minute he was on the bank with the reins in his grasp.

"My luck *is* in. I'll see this through yet," he said aloud.

As he stiffly, and with much effort, climbed into the slimy saddle, a gentle breeze passed over the veld, bringing with it the far-away pounding of horse's hoofs. It came from the point to which he was riding when he made the plunge into the vlei. He turned on his tracks towards the main road. He knew his objective now. Krugersdorp was sleeping three miles in front, and the Resurgam was eight miles to the south.

It was midnight when Hartley rode into the native

compound at the Resurgam. A native in a drunken sleep lay in the centre of the yard. Hartley dismounted near him, tore off the dirty blanket that partly covered the sleeper, and with it proceeded to rub down the mud-coated horse. Then he led him into one of the unoccupied Kafir sleeping-boxes, went to the building where the Kafir mealies were stored, filled a big cooking-pot, and placed it before the animal.

"If ever a horse earned a feed, it's you," he said, and with a parting pat he marched to M'Queen's quarters.

The old man sat up in bed, blinking at the lamp held in front of his face. He looked Hartley slowly up and down.

"Man, but the royal road to wealth is a vara dirty one. What's it mean, Dick?" he said.

"Means that you've got to turn out, find the whisky, and cook some water. I'm a bit wet and cold."

When Hartley had got into some of Adam's clothes, and refreshed himself with a scratch meal and whisky, he gave the old man the story of the expedition, keeping back no jot or tittle.

"And the end of it is," he said, when he had finished the narration, "that I have come back a wreck. I am being hunted for murder, I have lost Clarie, I have got to leave the country if I can, and all I have to show is this." He indicated the sjambok, which, secured to his wrist by a thong Afrikander fashion, had come safely through.

"Weel, Dick, I'm not going to remind you how

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dead I was against the business. You've only muddled it, as you have everything you've handled since I knew you. The great thing is to get you away, for, Dick, murder is bad enough, but high treason is an awful matter. How much did you say the diamonds were worth?"

"About a couple of thousand."

"Weel, it's no' so bad. I shall not tak' all that I am entitled to, for I never built on it, knowing you so well, Dick; but a bargain's a bargain, and I'm not out o' the wood mysel' yet. You must get away to Natal. You cannot carry stolen diamonds Kimberley way, for that means going out by Cape Town. It must be Natal or Delagoa."

Hartley sat moodily looking at the fire.

"It's rough, Adam, that I should have missed fire. It's bad enough to know one is a failure, but it's awful to be thought of as a murderer," he said, not regarding Adam's matter-of-fact attitude.

"If you're thought of as a murderer, Dick, you canna say you're a failure. Murderers are the only popular heroes who are never forgotten. Every Englishman knows all about Dick Turpin and Eugene Aram, but not one in a million knows or cares who invented chloroform or matches. Every Johnny-come-lately on the Rand can tell you the story of the murder of Honey and whom they suspect, but ask 'em who discovered the main reef or the cyanide process. Dick, man, you'll be known in the Transvaal generations after they've forgotten who it was made a seven-pennyweight proposition pay, and founded



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the B. K. Syndicate. Mind you, Dick, I'm only speaking sarcastically; I don't want to hurt your feelings, but, as you say, it's an awful thing to be thought a murderer, whether you're one or not. I'm sorry about the girl, though I've never seen her. But she's only a Boer girl, Dick; she won't think any the worse of you, will she?"

Hartley turned round fiercely.

"Shut up, you blitherer. I'll——"

"All right, Dick; you're uncommonly sensitive. Love affairs always change a man till he's married, then he's past change. But you must get away, Dick. If these Smeer youngsters are on your track, they'll have the Government on you in no time. You must get through before they pick up your spoor."

Hartley got up.

"You're right, Adam. Dick Hartley has got to run away for the first time in his life. There are some things too big to fight, and this is one of them. You have got to trust me till I get clear. I'm going to pay off everybody, but I've no cash. You must let me have a few pounds on this stone." He laid on the table the stone that had been part of poor old Smeer's share.

Adam took it up and examined it, then laid it down.

"No, Dick, I'll no ha' it. I'm afraid of 'em. They carry a curse. Keep it yoursel', and if you get through—and I ha' my doots—you'll send me as much o' the proceeds as you can spare. What is the least you could manage with?"

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"Fifteen pounds."

"Man, but it's an awful lot o' money to let go wi' no chance o' seeing again. Mak' it ten, Dick."

"Make it ten," Dick answered. The restraint he displayed in the face of a reflection that formerly would have roused him to passion, was the measure of the depth of his dejection and abasement.

Adam went to his room and disrobed. His bank was a hollow belt he wore next his skin. He returned, and carefully counted out nine sovereigns and two halves. He picked up one of the halves and pocketed it.

"I'll keep this, Dick; it's much easier to remember odd amounts."

Hartley smiled feebly, but made no comment.

"I'll lie down for a few hours while my clothes dry, then I'll ride to some station on the Pretoria line and book through to Middleburg, then on to Delagoa."

Hartley was astir and had saddled up by six o'clock. The two men had a farewell drink together.

"You must cheer up, Dick, for you've a lot to do to get through. Man, but if you had some o' my pheelosophy you'd pay little attention to what fules say or think," Adam remarked when Hartley repeated his regret and sense of shame in having to run away.

"Yes, Adam; it's a pity I was not born a Scotsman," he retorted.

"Weel, perhaps it is; but you've got the satisfaction o' knowing you're geographically vara near us. A Yorkshireman I regard, Dick, as the outcrop and surface indication that shows the good things that are to be found if you drive a tunnel far enough north



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to strike a Scotsman. I think you've nous enough to pull through, an' ye ha' my best wishes, Dick, though our partnerships ha' not paid dividends. You'll write if you get through, and send the money by a draft on the Netherlands Bank. It's cheaper."

Hartley rode easily for several miles. He did not wish to get too soon behind the ridge that screened a certain clump of tall eucalyptus-trees, for Rietspruit ay just beyond.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RECLUSE.

WITHIN a few miles of the spot where the Tropic of Capricorn intersects the 30th degree of longitude lies a flat valley that the few Englishmen who have seen it agree in describing as incomparable in its perfect beauty. Within the thirty square miles that comprise its area are gathered all those essentials which combine to realise a picture of nature so extravagantly rich in varied detail that no painter dare venture to present as an actuality its picture, for the most generous critic would be bound to suspect that imagination rather than fact had produced it. All that is most picturesque and graceful in South African scenery seems to have been collected between those mountain walls, leaving no room for aught that can suggest the prosaic and barren. No name has yet been given it by the natives; and even the map-makers have left it a blank, as if to acknowledge it as the untrodden neutral ground between the territories of the rival chiefs Magatien and Ramagoep.

The floor of the valley is a plateau many hundred feet above the mountain-ranges visible from its northern



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end, where the rocky walls open out like the legs of a pair of compasses and embrace a segment of the horizon bathed in shimmering sunshine during the hours that follow noon, and packed in masses of fleecy cloud during those that precede it.

About the centre of the valley plain stands a cluster of beehive huts that the most casual spectator would immediately recognise as being vastly superior to those of an ordinary kraal. Closer inspection would reveal the finished touch of a white man's hand; for though the structures are of ordinary native work, the externals show a care and tidiness unknown in any native kraal. The centre hut is larger than the others, and possesses two features that at once mark its European origin. It has a window and door of regulation shape and construction. Flower-beds, arranged in accurate rectilinear lines which no African native has ever been able to plan, surround the huts, and at varying distances are numerous cultivated plots, all distinguished by a regularity of shape never seen in Kafir cultivation; while groves of orange, lemon, and peach trees, disposed in not too rigid geometrical order, tone by their rich dark verdure the glaring green of the intervening grass. A narrow silver band of river, unmarred by intrusive rock or sandy patch, meanders smoothly between edges of reed and willow, to widen into a graceful elliptical lake, dotted with emerald isles of waving reeds. It is a fair, peaceful scene of subtropical beauty that no man can look on without delight.

Graham Wilmot looked down on it from the crest

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of the ridge that formed the eastern wall, and after feasting his eyes on the first sign of a white man's presence that he had seen for many days, he looked around for a path by which he could descend to the valley five hundred feet below. The mountain-sides were very steep, covered with bush and scrubby trees unknown to him, and cut into gullies deep and dangerous-looking. He was weak and exhausted, and bore the appearance of a man who had toiled long and laboriously through tangled bush and over rugged rock. His coat and shirt were in streaming rags, and even the stout riding-breeches and leather gaiters showed signs of stress; while his hands and face, and much of his arms, that could be seen through the torn coat and shirt, had numerous scratches on which the blood had hardened.

He walked painfully along the ridge till he found an accessible spot, and began to descend. In a few minutes he had entered a dense thorn-filled gulley. It was nearly an hour before, panting and in the last stage of collapse, he emerged on to the plain. The kraal lay about two miles away, and now that he was on level ground the distance appeared greater than when viewed from the top of the ridge. He threw himself into a bed of long grass beneath the shade of a thorn-tree and let nature have her way.

He was awakened by the baying of a dog and a sense of having been struck on the back with something heavy. He turned over and saw two huge boar-hounds sniffing and pawing him. A voice in English was calling the dogs off, and walking towards

him was a tall æsthetic-looking man in a pyjama suit and a broad panama hat. He stood looking at Wilmot searchingly for several moments, then, in a voice that betokened refinement and culture, inquired—

“Who are you?”

“My name is Wilmot, and I have been lost several days. I have wandered from our waggon.”

“You look ill. Do you think you could walk a couple of miles?”

“If there’s rest and refreshment at the end of it.”

“There will be that. Make an effort.”

Wilmot stood up, but the pain at the lower part of his back prevented an erect attitude. He was bent like an aged man.

“I’ve been hurt by a fall from a horse,” he explained.

“Yes, hurt your right kidney; I can see that. Walk quietly, the ground isn’t bad; but don’t talk.” He gave Wilmot his arm, and helped his progress with a ready tact that suggested experience.

“You’re a doctor,” Wilmot remarked, when after they had covered a few hundred yards the stranger suggested a rest, and gave advice as to the best attitude for reclining.

“I’m a little of most things,” he said; “but don’t talk.”

By slow and painful stages they reached the large hut, and Wilmot was led to a couch covered with what he immediately recognised as valuable karosses, made of the rarest skins. The circular room was

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about sixteen feet in diameter, and was furnished in a manner that suggested both taste and comfort. The material employed was almost exclusively of native product, but the manipulation of a skilful mechanic, possessed of effective and sufficient tools, was apparent in every article, from the chairs of bamboo to the table ingeniously constructed of pieces of pine-wood that had originally formed packing-cases. There was not a crude or unembellished piece of wood-work in sight: time and loving labour had their mark on everything. It was evidently the home of a man who had spent many hours in the elaboration of detail, and in investing the most unpromising material with an artistic substantiality.

Wilmot absorbed these details as he lay upon the couch, while his host was busied in the adjacent hut that served as kitchen preparing refreshment.

Half an hour later he had been restored to ease and comfort by a bath and food, and, clad in a pyjama suit provided by his host, was enjoying a pipe of good Transvaal tobacco and lounging on the couch in company of a pile of six months' old English magazines, while the sound of hammering from one of the huts proclaimed that the host was engaged in some mechanical occupation. He had left after seeing Wilmot comfortably disposed on the couch, advising him to sleep away the drowsy afternoon and reserve the story he had to tell till the cool of the evening.

The stranger had shown a surprising lack of curiosity as to his guest which was not reciprocated, Wilmot had not exhibited quite the same reticence

about his host, but had put several questions in the form of comments calculated to provoke an illuming answer; but they had been adroitly and, as Wilmot felt, purposely parried. His first idea, that his host might be a missionary, was dispelled by several expressions he had used, which, without being profane, were scarcely compatible with the phraseology of a professor of religion. But the most striking negative evidence was supplied by the absence of native attendants. There was apparently but one Kafir on the homestead, and South African tradition always associated a Mission station with a staff of "converted" servants. It was equally plain that this was not a trading station, nor was its master the type of man likely to be associated with trade. He had the languid air and refined and accurate speech of the scholar, and the numerous books that occupied the shelves and a side-table helped out the theory. It was also plain that he was a gentleman, and this deepened the mystery and excited in Wilmot that anxiety to fathom it which is erroneously supposed to be the peculiar weakness of women. He noticed that none of the books or magazines he examined bore any name, but that in several instances a title-page was missing, as if torn out as the most effective method of removing an inscription.

He was engaged in examining one such mutilated volume when the stranger entered. He put it down hurriedly, with a sense of shame, which became painfully acute when the first remark showed that his motive had been perceived.

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"My name is a very common one,—Smith, or, as the Boers would call it, Smit. The natives have another name for me. Do you understand Zulu? No? Then I will interpret. My native name is Ihlakana (Eeshlakana). It means a man who can see through everything."

Wilmot accepted the delicate rebuke, but tried to turn it off jocularly.

"Then I have come to the right source to discover my missing partner and my waggon,—in fact, to solve a great mystery."

"But the keenest hound must have a scent to work upon."

Mr Smith sat down in a lounge-chair and lit up his pipe. His attitude invited the story Wilmot shrank from telling—at least, in its entirety.

"Mine is a strange story," he began,—“the sort of thing one reads about in fiction but rarely meets in real life.”

"Either your acquaintance with South Africa is very slight or your story is passing strange," said Mr Smith reflectively. "You know the motto of the country, *Semper aliquid novi ex Africa*."

"Yes, but I fear my story is not particularly new—at any rate, the material is old; but the changes rung on it are, I think, different to the usual."

"Which is another way of saying your experience, whatever it may have been, is of the common South African type. Shall we say a story of phantom fortune, of greed and—and the consequences of greed?"

Wilmot looked up with the unspoken confession of an accurate shot that the dupe of the fortune-teller shows when a random arrow has struck the mark.

Mr Smith smiled as he noted Wilmot's bewilderment. He went on—

"I can quite understand two partners in an enterprise that turns out successfully quarrelling over the distribution of the plunder. That is a common story everywhere, and particularly in South Africa. Have you ever noticed that most of the discoverers of things worth having generally started out in pairs and came back alone?"

He looked at Wilmot under his eyebrows. The young man was lighting and puffing at an apparently refractory pipe. He had caught the habit from his partner.

Mr Smith, after a pause, resumed, speaking with marked earnestness—

"It has been my fate, Mr Wilmot, to hear many strange stories during the twenty years I have been in this country. I don't think it possible for a man to tell one that would surprise me—or shock me. I have seen the seamy side of the life of the town and the veld, and I assure you nothing you or any one else could tell me could make me think the worse of the teller. I have learned sympathy. I am a confirmed believer in the theory—it is more than a theory, it is a fact—that every man is the victim of his environment, that his crimes and his virtues are absorbed out of the atmosphere he lives in. The atmosphere of South Africa is impregnated with

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everything that goes to stimulate the lower and rudimentary passions,—greed, lust, selfishness. The motto, 'Every man for himself,' which in a civilised community a man would hesitate to express however much he believed it, is quoted as often as the Moham-medan quotes the precepts of the Koran, and with as much faith and fervour. The result is that we have come to take an indulgent view of actions that in an older civilisation would be regarded with horror, and among them is that of besting the other man, even to the extent of—removing him."

Wilmot had been listening with an obvious uneasiness that was not unnoticed by Mr Smith.

"You are making a great mistake if you think this applies to my case. Let me tell you my story," he said very unevenly, as if speaking with effort.

"Mr Wilmot, please do not misunderstand me. I know you must have a story,—a painful one,—and I also know that it will relieve you very much to tell it. I know further that a man in such a position is often deterred from being just to himself out of fear of the impression his story may have upon another. I was trying to convey to you—awkwardly perhaps—that you need have no such apprehension regarding me. I am, as I have told you, or rather I have been, in the habit of receiving strange confidences from my fellows. I will only say this: Do not tell me anything unless you feel you can trust me; follow your instinct in that matter. I always do. It was an instinctive faith in you that induced me to bring you here instead of taking you, as I

might, to a Kafir hut some distance away. You are the first white man who has entered this door for five years. I don't mention this as an inducement to you to talk. You are under no obligation to me, except that I am in a position to give you a little better hospitality than you would receive from any white man in the country under the circumstances. I only say this,—tell me all or nothing. Half confidences are an insult to the receiver and an injustice to the giver."

"I felt that you took it for granted that I had—done something criminal. The fact is, I am the victim."

"Perhaps it would be only fair if I told you what I know," said Mr Smith. "There is very little that occurs in this great district that I am not acquainted with. As a matter of fact, very little does occur, and for that reason such an incident as you have been connected with becomes of profound interest. I know that three white men took a machine-gun to 'Mpfeu, and that a few days ago one of them—was buried. I also know that a second, accompanied by a native, left the waggon and rode towards Pietersburg soon after. I recognise you as the third from the Kafir description of your long legs and that trick you have of screwing up your left eye. You have been in the habit of wearing a monocle,"—Mr Smith smiled,—“and abandoned it soon after arriving in this country because you were chaffed about it.”

"You are well called Ihlakana."

"I claim no credit for this. I have been kept well

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informed by the natives. They are the closest observers in the world. The monacle I deduced from the description I had of your trick with the eye. The rest is the fruits of the most perfect system of rapid and accurate observation and telegraphic communication in the world—Kafir telegraphy."

Wilmot smiled incredulously, though he was very much puzzled.

"Don't get the notion that I am a mystic, a Kafir theosophist, or Cagliostro. There is nothing uncanny about the business. It is only that I know the native better than most white men, who see in him only a brute beast very little advanced beyond apedom. Believe me, we whites have much to learn from the Bantu."

"So you do not think that the average Colonial understands the Kafir?" Wilmot asked. He was not particularly interested in the turn the subject had taken, but it diverted the unpleasant matter that was occupying his thoughts.

"How can he? How can an illiterate, ignorant man, with no soul beyond the accumulation of money, understand the complex psychology of a mind entirely new to him? He doesn't understand his own race outside his own narrow circle. He is as much an authority on the Kafir as Tommy Atkins is on the philosophy of Buddhism after five years at an Indian station."

"I presume you have had time and opportunity for studying the native?" Wilmot was still fencing to gain respite.

"Yes; I have been among them nearly ten years. I have ceased to interest myself in my own people. Like you, I once made a mistake; only mine is irreparable,—yours is not."

This was such a direct challenge to tell his story and justify himself, that Wilmot could no longer evade it. He plunged boldly in, and told everything from the day he left Johannesburg to the fall from his horse. From that event the record was obscure and hazy, like the waking memory of a bad dream.

"The unconsciousness is easily explained," said Mr Smith. "When you fell, you struck your right kidney against a sharp stone. That in itself was sufficient to produce light-headedness, but the large doses of brandy your friend poured down your throat made it a certainty. You were probably delirious off and on for some time. The curious part of an accident such as that is, there are little or no external symptoms for several days, though the pain would be great. The bruising is internal, and it is not till three or four days that it shows more than a reddish mark over the injured spot, which gradually becomes almost black."

"Surely you are a medical man?" Wilmot interrupted.

"I have read some surgery, among other things," Mr Smith replied evasively. "But tell me all you remember after you woke up and saw Ellis."

"When I came to myself, I was lying flat with my face in the mud by the side of a little spring a hundred yards from the waggon. I can only suppose that I

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had gone there in my delirium. I have a recollection of being always thirsty and dreaming of water."

"One of the symptoms of kidney trouble—thirst."

"I heard voices, and turned. I could only see the tail of the waggon through the bushes. Ellis was pulling out the extra sailcloth that was stored there, and the man who used to visit me in the jail at Pretoria was shaking it as Ellis unrolled it. I could see also that one of the brake-blocks had been removed. I caught sight of a revolver-case round the waist of the man Vollmer, and immediately a terrible fit of fear seized me. It is no good disguising it,—it was the most abject funk. The sight of that revolver instantly brought up the glassy, fixed eyes of poor old Smeer, and the blood on his cheek and beard, and an irresistible desire took hold of me to get out of sight of the waggon. I ran into the thick bush and scrambled on like a madman: I suppose I must have been mad. After that my memory of what happened is a confused tangle,—of scratches, falls, of being held fast in thorny bush, of darkness and cold, and above all, of a haunting thirst. I remember lying at length to drink at a little stream, and as I drank a leaf floated past. Exactly the same thing had occurred at the moment I came to consciousness when I heard the voices, and the whole scene and all that I felt and thought at the time flashed before me. I got up and ran till I suppose I must have dropped from fatigue, for it was about sunset when I got this second scare. The sun was well up when I came to, and I was wet through with dew and

shivering. This seemed to bring me to myself, for I got up and tried to get my bearings. Then it was that I knew I was lost. After that I only remember a sort of madness. I believe I talked to myself, and I think I blubbered."

"There's nothing to be ashamed of in that," said Mr Smith. "You are doing what few men have the courage to do—telling the truth as to your conduct when the pluck and heart had been taken out of you. Men generally tell only the heroic part. I know what it is to be lost and starving. A man can no more be a hero then than he can be jocular and high-spirited in the face of a frightful calamity. Environment, again. When a man is fighting purely physical conditions, the animal in him is master, and he yields to it: matter is more potent than spirit. And now the question is, What has become of your friend Hartley, and Golosh? I can guess where the native is. He bolted if he had the chance: if he did not, he has joined Ellis and Vollmer. As to Hartley, I think he went off to Pietersburg to get a doctor. A case like yours would be very puzzling to him. As an old hand, he would know that it would be useless waiting while food was running out. He would see that you could not be moved, and as a practical man he would act. As far as I can make it out, he left for Pietersburg the day after your accident. He must have left Golosh with you, for the native he had with him was a raw youth. I will send a messenger to the waggon, which is about thirty miles east of this place. You had better write a brief note bidding Hartley return with the messenger."

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The plan was acted upon. A Kafir was procured from a neighbouring kraal and despatched with the note, and instructions to bring certain articles of clothing, and to make a thorough search for a certain rhinoceros-hide sjambok. There was no necessity for enjoining a general stocktaking and survey. A woman's scrutiny of the toilette of a rival is a careless, resultless side-glance compared with the comprehensive observation of a Kafir.

The following day Wilmot was sufficiently recovered to walk round the homestead. He saw everywhere evidences of the same mechanical ingenuity, the same comfort and cleanliness and order, that had charmed him in the residential hut.

"I have much of the Robinson Crusoe resourcefulness," said Mr Smith, "but you see I am ahead of him in the matter of tools."

They were in a hut devoted to the constructive arts. A well-built carpenter's bench occupied the centre, and on frames around the walls were arranged more tools than Wilmot knew the names and uses of, while several small articles were in varying stages of development.

"The secret of happiness in a life like mine," said his host, "is occupation and method. Not the occupation that is the outcome of a passing impulse to be doing something, but occupation on a definite task. I have my daily programme of duties, and I carry it out rigorously, from the milking of the cow—for I can't stand the notion of drinking milk in which a Kafir has washed his hands—to entering up my diary the last

thing at night. My kitchen and flower gardens occupy a large share of my attention, and repay me, for there is very little hard work required. Nature is my principal assistant. I don't know what the return per acre was from the Garden of Eden, but I don't think it would beat this valley. I have only to scratch the surface and throw the seed about. The return is so large that I don't even trouble to keep away the birds and insects."

Graham inquired the nature of the crops produced.

"It is easier to say what will not, or rather what does not, grow than what does. I have had but one failure—and that I regret more than anything. I tried the English primrose, but it came to nothing. On the whole, perhaps it was as well. It might have induced a bad attack of home-sickness. I have known a pet flower do that."

"And do you mean to say that you have spent years alone on this spot and have never left it?" Wilmot asked when they were sitting over their pipes in the living hut.

"I have been here ten years less a few weeks, and you are the third white man who has been beneath this roof."

"Not the third you have seen during that time?"

"Oh no. Sometimes the fit takes me to ride out for a day or two, and I have occasionally come upon white men passing through the country. If possible I avoid them; if not, I inquire the way in the opposite direction."

"And you have selected this life voluntarily?"

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"Fate drove me from the life that was chosen for me by education, position, and tradition. This life is my own choice. I told you I once made a mistake, as many a better man has. It meant social ostracism. I made one effort to regain the position I had lost, but the strain was worse than any success could atone for. I had always a secret longing for a life of comparative solitude, free from the trammels of artificiality, and here I have found it. I am as nearly happy as that state can be attained to by a man who has seen life and knows happiness to be merely a relative condition. I have almost buried the past, and have very little desire to revive it. Of course I have my periods of soul-sickness and yearning for the might have been, but I have one drastic remedy, —I refresh my memory with the story of my great mistake, and in a couple of days I have recovered."

"Well, as you say, you have had a taste of the other life, and probably had a good innings," Wilmot remarked, glancing at the grey hair and careworn face that signalled sixty years.

"For ten years I enjoyed, or tried to enjoy, most that comes in the way of a man born with the means and position to embrace them. Yes, I have known what it was to be like Byron, —famous at twenty and infamous at thirty."

Wilmot looked scrutinisingly at the face of the speaker. It was even older than its first impression had suggested, for the intense seriousness and emotion of the recital had drawn into clearer prominence the lines and wrinkles, and the attitude of dejection

into which he had lapsed in the lounge-chair was that of a broken man.

"You have been out of your world many years?" Wilmot hazarded.

"If, as some poet says, life is made up of heart-throbs, not of years, then it is centuries since I was my other self. As a matter of fact, it is barely twelve years. I am not yet forty."

Wilmot stared in wonderment. Before he could express his astonishment Mr Smith sprang up with sudden alertness.

"Never mind; let the dead past bury its dead. Let me give you some music," he said with sprightly gaiety.

He went to a shelf and took down a violin, fixed up a music-stand artistically constructed of bamboo, selected a piece from a pile of sheet music, and began.

Wilmot, himself a more than usually accomplished amateur musician, listened, charmed. The performer had that mastery of the instrument which comes of love rather than mere mechanical dexterity. The listener noted how passages were altered and varied from the score,—always with effect, sometimes with advantage. The player went on with another piece, apparently unconscious of the approving ejaculations, even of the presence of his auditor. When he had played the cadenza of the fourth selection, he turned over the pieces he had placed on the stand as if looking for another. Wilmot took advantage of the pause to ask if the player had a well-known classic.

"No; things like that are too closely associated with the other life. I have a few of them, by

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accident, but I try to deny myself by not playing them. Fortunately, the supply of what is new and good is fairly large, and I am forcing myself to an appreciation of another school of music. It is hard, but best for my soul comfort. I am thankful that South African flowers have no scent and the birds no song. Music and perfumes can be heaven or hell to a man who has felt."

"Does the same reservation apply to books?"

"Not in my case. I don't know how it is with other men, but a book presents new and added impressions to me with every reading. I—in fact, most men view an author's conceptions and ideas through the glass of their own impressions; and as experience grows, so they take a broader grasp of the subject, and see into depths of meaning that were before beyond them. That is particularly true of poetry. 'In Memoriam,' for instance, is not the same thing to men of different age. Its application grows with experience, like a text-book on whist or chess: it is not till the tyro has become expert that he can appreciate the complexities of the master-mind. The best-read man I ever knew had not read half that I have, but he had regulated his reading by cycles of seven years, re-reading each work at the completion of the period. The result was that he found a new book in the old every time."

"So that, if he reads often enough, he will find the author's meaning the very reverse of what he thought it when he began," Wilmot suggested laughingly.

"Not necessarily. I take it that he develops, and

gradually levels up to the author. The boy reads 'Robinson Crusoe' because of the thrill of adventure, and is a little bit disappointed because the savages don't attack oftener. The man sees in it a fascinating vindication of the triumph of action over adversity."

"Which you have realised in practice?"

"Yes, undoubtedly. Like Robinson, my effort has relieved me of the tortures of morbid repining at Fate and given me a new motive in life—self-centred, no doubt, and narrow, for my efforts begin and end with myself."

"Then you are not desirous of extending your benefits and privileges to your neighbours—the Kafirs?"

"God forbid that I should be an instrument for the destruction of innocence and happiness! If it were possible for a man to choose his own life at the very beginning, I should elect to be born in a Kafir kraal in this perfect region and live their life. They begin where we civilised beings leave off, content and happy, knowing little physical and no mental pain."

"Not a very lofty ambition for an heir of all the ages."

"Perhaps not, according to civilised notions. But surely that man is to be envied who has attained and who can retain happiness with least pain, and that is the position of the Kafir as long as he keeps out of range of progress. The poet you quote saw in the savage life the panacea for the pains of too much civilisation. If the ultimate aim of progress

is happiness, it has failed miserably so far. If it has increased our pleasures, it has quadrupled our pains: Old Magato, who used to be chief up yonder, summed up the position to a deputation of rival missionaries and traders who wanted permission to settle in his country. They urged the usual hypocritical pretence of anxiety to benefit him and his people. 'It is clear,' he said, 'that you do not agree among yourselves which is the right road. Go back and settle it, and when you are agreed it will be time for me to listen.' The exponents of the panacea for peace and happiness are still fighting one another."

"I can see that you have absorbed the same ideas regarding the folly, even the cruelty, of civilising the native which nearly every man holds after he has been among them any time; but may it not be that the same mental process will follow in regard to your present views as you have described in the matter of books,—that later experience may reverse your first impressions, and you may even tire of the solitary life and revert to first conditions?"

Mr Smith reflected for a moment.

"Until I am convinced by results that the civilised state is productive of the greatest happiness to the greatest number, I shall continue to believe that the Kafir is nearer the *summum bonum* than the white. With regard to my return to my world, that is impossible, and I do not encourage any line of reasoning that would make it appear otherwise. I do not expect you to believe that a man who, like myself, has tasted the best that civilisation can produce can resign it

without a pang, or think of it as a thing not desirable. But there is such a thing as paying too great a price for a pleasure; and I am satisfied that the pain of striving, even if I succeeded, could never be atoned for by the result. My present life is the least of two evils, and I logically select it, and spare no effort to make it an agreeable substitute. I am, as perhaps you may know, not the only recluse in this region. There are at least a dozen who, for various reasons, have long since cut themselves off from their fellows and the life for which they were intended, and are quite content."

"Do you ever meet them?" Wilmot asked.

"Very rarely; nor have I any desire to know them. We have nothing in common, except to be 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot.' Besides, there is one insuperable bar—they all have native wives. To my mind that at once removes a man from all claim to consideration as a fellow-creature."

This was the last time Mr Smith spoke of himself. The converse had throughout been marked by an effort, though a certain relief was apparent, the natural effect of that hunger for sympathetic unburdening of a load that can rarely be resisted even by the most self-contained and reticent. Wilmot recognised that the subject was one to avoid, and, much as he would have liked to learn the identity of this remarkable representative of the modern hermits, he restrained his curiosity and sought no more to pry behind the drawn curtain.

The following day brought the native who had been sent to the waggon. He reported having found only

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the spoor of a trek several days old, and signs of a long outspan.

The two men held consultation.

"You must stay here a month or so," said Mr Smith, "and then get back to the Rand by way of Pietersburg. By that time the hunt for the gun-runners will have cooled, and you can slip through with something like safety. Many things may happen in two months, and I will send a Kafir down in the interval to make inquiries. He can seek employment on the Resurgam mine, and carry a letter to your friend M'Queen, who will probably be able to tell you what has become of Hartley."

Wilmot expressed his gratitude, also his reluctance to abuse hospitality.

"I can appreciate your feelings," said Mr Smith, "and I can suggest a way of relieving you of any scruples on that point. You have no money, and you will require some if you are to get out of the country. There is in this district, as you perhaps know, a little alluvial gold,—not by any means as much as the prospectors think, but if you care to work, you can in a month or two find sufficient to put you in possession of funds. I have never worked it myself, for two reasons: first, because my wants are so small that the modest income I receive irregularly from a little property I have elsewhere keeps me supplied with all the cash I need for books, tools, and material, and a few luxuries; but principally, because I know that I could not go on sending raw gold out of the district without attracting the attention of the last people I am anxious to see."



The Recluse

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He showed Wilmot a few samples of the gold-dust he had washed out at various times and places.

A day or two later the two walked a few miles to a spot higher up the valley where a tributary of the Letaba river has its source, and Wilmot was initiated into the laborious art of washing the river-gravel. A couple of hours' work produced half-a-thimble measure of gold-dust, and decided Wilmot to prosecute steady work on the spot.

In the course of a day or two Mr Smith had constructed a cradle and the few appliances necessary for the work, which, with a small tent and cooking utensils, were transported to the spot; and Wilmot began to sample the joys and tribulations of an alluvial gold-digger, spending the day at work, and returning at sunset to compensate for toil by an evening made delightful by music, books, and conversation.

The returns, though not startling, were good, averaging nearly two ounces a-day, the monotony of a regular output being now and then relieved by the appearance of a small nugget sufficiently large to give promise of better things.

At the end of the month they weighed out nearly a hundred ounces of gold, worth about £350, and the gold fever had taken hold of the digger. He began to talk of fortunes.

Mr Smith looked grave.

"Don't you think you owe me something?" he asked.

"I owe you everything," Wilmot answered.

"Then I am going to ask you to repay me by abandoning the work. I am fearful of the conse-

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quences to both of us. Sooner or later the source of that gold will be guessed, and my life here will be finished. I want you to promise to be content to leave as soon as the messenger returns. It is strange that we have not seen him yet."

Wilmot saw the justice if not the logic of the request, and consented. Strangely enough, the gravel began to pan out poorly within the next few days, and the day's washing sank from two ounces to ten or twelve pennyweights.

"I will not show you another spot," said Mr Smith when Wilmot reported the short fall, "and I ask you not to seek one."

Wilmot did not return to the river.

That evening Mr Smith was unusually quiet and distraught. At Wilmot's request he took out his violin, and after playing one or two selections wandered off into Braga's serenata. He played without music. Suddenly he stopped, and put down the instrument.

"Wilmot, you must go," he said earnestly. "Did you hear that? I am drifting back. I have not played that for years. I dared not. Your company is taking me back to the old life: it is undoing the work of years. You must go."

He paced the room excitedly.

"I think I understand," Wilmot said. "I will go; but why not listen to the calling and go with me?"

"You don't know what you ask, Wilmot. If you feel any kindness or sympathy for me, go;" and he walked out of the hut into the moonlight, and disappeared behind a grove of orange-trees.



Wilmot did not see him again till breakfast-time next morning. He was careworn, and marked with the evidences of a sleepless night.

"I have made arrangements for a horse and a native to guide you to Pietersburg to-day," he said. "I rely on your honour not to show that gold till you are out of the Transvaal, nor to say where you got it. I can let you have sufficient cash to carry you to Cape Town, and there you will have no difficulty in getting a bank-draft on the dust; and I advise you to book your passage home by the first boat. You are too good to spoil in this country, and too weak to resist the process."

Wilmot's preparations were soon completed, the convenient bestowal of the gold being the most difficult task, which was overcome by packing it into a revolver-case carried at the belt.

Mr Smith walked by the side of the pony a short distance. At the orange-grove he extended his hand.

"Good-bye, Wilmot. It has been a pleasure to know you, and a pain. Go back to your old life and live it as a man should, and never be led away by any false notions that happiness is to be gained by bypaths. Write me that you have arrived at Cape Town. Address me at Pietersburg, but say only you are doing as I wish. Don't try to take me out of the present. Good-bye, and God bless you."

The exile and the mystery of his crime went back to the solitude and silence of the Golden Valley.

JUL

ON one of the spur
like spokes of a wheel
a prospector's camp
tain-land that lay
of furrows dug with
of the ice age. It is
nakedness is but spari
of green; where the s
the kloof, and the r
buck have almost cea
hailed his rare appea
really lives within the
Richard Hartley ha
in the direction far t
watching for sign of
despatched in the ear
Brooke's store

return is eagerly awaited, and Hartley was irritably impatient. He sat on a packing-case on the shady side of the tent, took a much-worn newspaper-cutting from his pocket-book, and read, for probably the hundredth time, the paragraph which he knew by heart. It was from 'The Times of Natal' of three weeks back, and was a bald announcement that the latest arrivals at the Concentration Camp at Maritzburg included the families of the Boers captured in the Krugersdorp District, among them being the wife and children of the late Field-Cornet and Commandant de Villiers.

"Which Commandant de Villiers, I wonder?" Hartley soliloquised. "I know a dozen, and the fools who fill in these particulars are as likely to put Krugersdorp as any other dorp, as it's about the only district they know how to spell properly."

As he replaced the cutting his quick eye detected a Kafir, with haversack slung on his shoulder, and carrying the three sticks without which no native pedestrian is properly equipped, coming leisurely over the ridge a mile away. Hartley snatched up a sjambok—the sjambok of the tragic expedition—and hurried impatiently to meet him.

There was but one letter in the bag. Hartley's correspondence was confined to occasional communications with the Durban Syndicate for whom he was prospecting; but this was the expected one. He tore open the stiff foolscap envelope, blotched with official marks innumerable, and extracted a sheet of formal-looking typewritten matter. He read it aloud,

"SIR,—I have
your letter, date
formed whether
Theunissen de
District of the T
burg Concentratio

"In reply there
that your inquiry
first instance, to the
have forwarded it
mandant of Pieterm
superintendent of Co

"I have further
specify the names, s
inquired about, nor t
mitted to the camp; n
of the family your inqu

"I send herewith
please fill up in accord
section 146, subsection
14, 1900, and send then
Departments • (2) •

- simplify and reduce such communications to systematic form.—I have the honour to be, sir, your obedient servant."

Here followed a wavy line like a capital M, repeated till it faded away in an invisible tail.

Hartley opened out the accompanying sheets of stiff paper, glanced at their exasperating array of tables and figures, then crunched them into a ball and threw them at the head of the astonished Kafir.

"I've a good mind to give you a sound hiding," he began, raising the sjambok. Then he checked himself.

"No, I mustn't lose my temper. I'll go down to Maritzburg. Hurry up, you beggar." And he relieved his irritation at official red-tape by striding rapidly back to camp.

Next morning, carefully dressed in the town-going clothes that had lain in his portmanteau for over two years, he left camp early, bound for the railway station, sixty miles away, that was the nearest railage point for Maritzburg.

It is a magnificently rugged route, from the elevation of six thousand feet at which his camp stood to the lower levels of the intermediate region, across the highlands of Natal. Apart from the stimulating and joyful anticipation of the mission on which he was bent, he looked forward to the long ride with that pleasurable elation that is felt by most men who find themselves amid the tumultuous exhilaration of mountain scenery after a long sojourn on such monotonous plains as had formed Hartley's horizon for so many years.

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His way was down steep mountain-tracks that only a horse born in the region can be trusted to ride in safety; sometimes saddle-high in the drifts of the beautiful Lateni, least known but most scenically perfect of Natal's mountain-streams. Past the solitary farm that, remote from human ken, marks the western limit of the Colony's slow and sleepy expansion, to Brooke's famed homestead—an oasis in the desert, the point of departure for the explorer of the wilds and of the traveller returning to civilisation. Thence, after a brief halt, he rode for two hours over the grassy bosoms that lie beneath the shelter of lordly Mullangaan, whose sharp-cut peaks and wall-like ridges suggest the ruins of a mighty city of palaces and temples; down the stupendous gorge of Hlatakulu (Shlatakulu), where a mile-long wedge has been cleanly lifted from the earth's surface with the smoothness of human handiwork. Into those untrodden depths the traveller gazes with thrilling awe as he pulls his horse cautiously to the farther side of the sloping road that skirts it, marvelling—and perchance scouting—at the legend of how Charley Brooke engineered across the fearsome chasm the waggon whose wheels made the first tracks in the virgin wilds of the lovely Lateni valley.

Still southward he rode, threading a cautious way among the huge boulders rolled from the crest of Mullangaan, lying on the grassy plains as if idly left there after some giants' game of bowls. He climbed through Carter's Nek, where the wind is never still, and looked backward and downward from above the clouds and mist on to the mountains and valleys be-

neath. A halt at the drift at Inzinga to breathe and water the horse, a glance up at the perpendicular rock in whose caves the bushmen made their last stand against the encroaching settler, and then a loose rein and a fast canter over miles of settled country, where Kafir tracks are no longer the sole substitutes for road.

Mercy for the horse rather than the weariness of the rider impels acceptance of the hospitality of the Fox homestead, nestling beneath that Spion Kop whose claim to historical fame as the outlook whence the Voortrekkers of 1834 spied the promised land has of late been overshadowed by the sanguinary prominence of another kop sixty miles northwards. From Fox's, Hartley rode next day down the winding slope that ends with the railway station at Nottingham Road, where the traveller stables his weary horse at the hotel and exchanges the saddle for the leisured ease of a first-class carriage.

On the bare space beyond the railway station at Maritzburg had been erected a township of canvas for the reception of Boer families removed from their homes in pursuance of the conqueror's policy of pacification, and thither Hartley, armed with the necessary permit obtained at the office of the commandant, travelled as fast as the perspiring ricksha boy could drag him.

"De Villiers?" echoed the official of whom he sought information. "They're all blessed 'de some-things' here. There are crowds of de Beers, de Vries, de Jongs, and de Villiers. There's a good-looking

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young woman of that name teaching the school yonder. Perhaps she might be one of 'em you want."

Hartley said he thought it probable, and asked to be conducted to her.

They passed down a street of canvas tenements, the occupants often hastily closing the doors on the approach of a visitor; for they had grown to resent the impertinent stares of curious strangers, who made up parties to gaze at the refugees as if they were strange animals caught in the veld and caged for exhibition.

From a large marquee came the babble of youthful voices. The guide stopped and tried to enter; but the flap had been secured inside, probably from the same motive as caused the other tent-dwellers to close their doors.

It was opened by a young woman whose black dress and crape armlet conveyed a silent and significant story. She threw her dark eyes on the official as if resenting his intrusion, but his apology was not needed, for as she glanced up at his companion she turned deadly pale.

"Clarie, I've come to see you."

Hartley seized her hand and pulled her towards him impulsively.

She put her disengaged hand on his breast, as if to ward off his embrace.

"You have got my letter, Dick?" she said with an effort.

"Yes—no; never mind letters. I've come. Come out and talk to me."

Like the farewell speech he had once prepared, the

premeditated words of his greeting, apologetic and explanatory, refused to form themselves in the tumult of the supreme moment that called for them. But no formal prefatory speech was needed. The look of joy in her eyes was her answer to the unspoken words.

Woman-like, she was the first to recover her self-possession.

"Go and walk in the burial-ground, Dick. I'll come to you presently."

He shook her hand solemnly, as if bidding a formal good-bye, and walked out of the camp to the little military graveyard some distance away, where the fast-increasing mounds bore testimony to the truth that shot and shell are the least of the weapons of death; for of the host of sleepers in the narrow beds, not one had fallen on the field of battle, but in futile contest with the most potent horror of war—disease.

Hartley was meditating on this fact, brought to mind by the iterative inscriptions, when he heard a footstep, and Clarie, in deep mourning, stood beside him.

He took both her hands and looked searchingly into her face, a little more anxious-looking than of yore, but full of an intensified tender womanliness.

"At last!" he said.

"At last! And you understand all?" she answered.

"This is all I want to understand," he said. "Let us walk where we can talk."

A funeral party was approaching. They turned out of the cemetery and walked into the open, where or whither they regarded not, but that they were together.

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"I am so glad you have not been fighting my people," she said when he had given a fairly connected and detailed account of his doings during the three years that had passed since the night she sent him away to save him.

"No, Clarie. My life is too valuable to risk in fighting people against whom I have no quarrel for the sake of Rand financiers, whom I have every cause to hate. I loafed in the coast towns hunting for Wilmot till I grew sick of the sight of brick and mortar. The old fever took hold of me, and I was hungry for the smell of the veld. I have been ever since alone in the Drakensberg, prospecting for a Durban Syndicate; but this time, Clarie, I have the lion's share."

"But why did you never answer my letter?"

"I never got it."

She drew herself away from him and looked in his eyes with startled, questioning earnestness.

"You never got it? Then you still believe what I said that night? Oh, Dick!"

"I never heard of you from that day to this."

"But, Dick, I sent Toli after you with a note that very night. He told me he gave it you. How could you come back to me like this if you still think I meant what I said?"

"He never saw me; but if the lie he told made you happier, I forgive him."

"It did make me happy, until your long silence mystified me."

"But the mystery is clear now. I forget what you

said that night, now that I have you." He kissed her for the first time in their long friendship. When he released her she was weeping.

An hour later they were in the canvas hut occupied by the de Villiers family. Mrs de Villiers shook hands limply with Dick. Had he been the next-door neighbour making an afternoon call, she could not have shown less surprise or interest. The children exhibited a little more enthusiasm, which cooled when they found he had not brought peppermints.

Mrs de Villiers opened with a whine at the cramped quarters.

"There will be more room next week, mother: Dick and I are to be married," said Clarie.

"Of course, you selfish creature, you will leave me now that I have no husband to look after me, and Hendrika married, and your brother a prisoner at St Helena. What would your father think of you?" Mrs de Villiers began to whimper.

"It was my father's wish that I should do as I am doing," Clarie replied, but with no show of resentment.

"Don't call Clarie selfish, tante!" Hartley interrupted. "She has given the best years of her life to you and the children; now she is giving herself to me."

"Giving herself to you!" Mrs de Villiers exclaimed, all the scorn and hate of which she was capable condensed into the "you." "I know what I should give you,—a sjamboking."

"Ah!"

Clarie started forward with the ejaculation, went



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It was I



EPILOGUE.

THE spot where the prospecting camp of Richard Hartley stood for two weary years is to-day part of the 6000-acre farm of Rietspruit, the latest, and probably the last, addition to the prosperous Berg stock-farms of Natal. There are many reed-grown spruits upon it to justify its name; but its title was selected by Dick to perpetuate the memory of another place on the other side of the Drakensberg, where the shadow and sunshine in the lives of the owners of the new Rietspruit had end and beginning. It is not, perhaps, an idyllic place, gauged by the standard of some of the farms of Natal; for its boundaries are forbidding mountain-ranges, and bare, rugged rock enters too largely into the picture to make it as softly pleasing to the eye as the vast green stretches that formed Clarie's childhood conception of what a farm should be. But those ugly grey rocks contain the potentialities of mineral wealth that throw into insignificance the product of the grassy stone-strewn valleys where the rapidly-increasing stock graze contentedly. The diamonds

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from Wilmot's strangely cherished sjambok purchased the herd of cattle, which await the day when he or his lawful heirs respond to the inquiries Hartley has instituted and claim them. But the penetrative eye of the solitary prospector detected the secret of the rocks that will some day make the Hartleys rich with the product of a mineral that has added more to the wealth of the world than the mines of de Beers. The newly erected homestead is the most substantial and handsome in the district,—absurdly large and ornate, the neighbours say, for a couple without a family. Little Lisbeth, now a graceful girl of ten, supplies the essential sunshine of childhood's presence, and old Adam M'Queen contributes the dignity of sententious maturity. He has his workshop, but no secret now, for the first trial of his motor blazoned that to the world, and proved the prescience of Solomon when he declared there was nothing new under the sun. The old man took his disappointment with the proverbial philosophy of his race, and volunteered for the war in a strictly non-combative capacity. He was shut up in Mafeking, and claims to have designed many of the ingenious tricks and traps that kept Snyman and Sarel Eloff at long range. His mechanical genius is now in-spanned in the waggon of pastoral progress, and his ingenious irrigation schemes and water-power appliances promise to make Rietspruit one of the show farms of Natal.

Good-natured, indolent Piet de Villiers answered to the roll-call when the Burghers of his district were ordered on commando, and took a command that was ended by a lance-thrust at Elandslaagte. Hendrika dismissed thought of the Rooinek, and the year before the war gave herself to an exquisite young Hollander official, who outvied her in his love for strong perfumes, but at the first sniff of gunpowder took her to the land of his native dykes and dams. The sons of Johannes Smeer took possession of the barren acres, but quarrelled and separated over a lawsuit that followed the receipt of a sum of £250, remitted from Natal for waggon-hire and compensation. The same mail had brought a draft for £500 to Adam M'Queen, who promptly invested it in a working model of his motor that refused to yield its conserved energy without the stimulating assistance of human agency in the shape of a hand-turned crank.

Dick realised well over £2000 for his diamonds, and after discharging his liabilities, legal and moral, with the balance paid the first instalments on the purchase price of Rietspruit. Wilmot has not yet been traced; but should he ever present himself, or his claim to the share of 'Mpfeu's diamonds, he will find the capital intact in the form of a herd of the finest cattle in Natal.

Unknown to Dick or Clarie, old Adam cherishes as carefully as he guarded the secret of his abortive motor

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two pieces of printed paper. One is a cutting from the Transvaal 'Staats Courant,'—an official advertisement offering a reward of £250 for the apprehension of Richard Hartley and Graham Wilmot for the crime of high treason, and a further reward of £100 for the arrest and conviction of the aforesaid Richard Hartley on a charge of murder. Field-cornets are instructed to apply for the reward at an office that has now ceased to exist. The second cutting is from a Johannesburg newspaper of later date, detailing how a police patrol from Lydenburg came upon the decomposed bodies of a white man and a native, both shot from behind. The European was supposed to be one Bale Ellis, once employed in the secret service of the late Transvaal Government.

From the flower-laden verandah of the house there is visible on a spur of the Drakensberg a neck through which the sun sends golden rays just before it disappears in carmine splendour. Adam has noticed that Dick, dreaming over his afternoon pipe, often looks towards it with far-away pensive gaze, as though he knew, as Adam does, that his line of sight shoots straight to a spot three hundred miles north-westward, whence the visioned gleam of illicit gems once beckoned to disaster. Some day, the old man thinks, the gleam of those stones may again beckon through the rift, and Dick may hear the whispered call that faintly echoes in the ear of the most wearied adventurer who thinks the day of action past; for Adam knows too

well the Lurline lure of the African Beyond. Against such a day he holds those printed records to flash in the dazzled eyes as silent reminders of a story that has many a time and oft recurred in slightly varied form beneath the African sun,—a story whose moral is expressed in the Zulu proverb, “He who would climb the mountain by secret paths may fall into the Krantz.”

THE END.

